MERRY XMAS
To Jean
with best
wishes for
Xmas & New
Year.
Ella.

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Modern English Short Stories

Edited by

Edward J. O'Brien

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To
H. M. TOMLINSON

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Introductory Note

'MODERN ENGLISH SHORT STORIES' is a collection designed to present a panorama of the best work published by contemporary English writers of short stories. This collection is drawn from my previous annual volumes and represents what I regard as the cream of those books. Each story has appeared in a British or American periodical since 1921. I regret that in one or two instances, where there is a conspicuous omission of an admired author, the omission is due to copyright limitations.

I make grateful acknowledgment to the authors of the stories included in this volume, and to the following publishers for permission to reprint stories: to Messrs. Hurst & Blackett, Ltd., for permission to reprint 'Mr. Franklyn's Adventure' by the late James Murray Allison; to Messrs. Jonathan Cape, Ltd., for permission to reprint 'The Idealist' by Mary Arden, 'Mrs. Lovelace' by Martin Armstrong, 'The Higgler' by A. E. Coppard, 'The Reaping Race' by Liam O'Flaherty, and 'Blessed Are the Meek' by the late Mary Webb; to Messrs. Hutchinson & Co. (Publishers), Ltd., for permission to reprint 'Where Was Wych Street?' by the late Stacy Aumonier, 'Red Hair' by Elizabeth Bibesco, and '"Genius"' by Elinor Mordaunt; to Messrs. Cassell & Co., Ltd., for permission to reprint 'The Dream of Ah Lum' by Thomas Burke and 'Bible Brown' by H. M. Tomlinson; to Messrs. William Heinemann, Ltd., for permission to reprint 'A Hedonist' by John Galsworthy and 'The Taipan' by W. Somerset Maugham; to Messrs. Chatto and Windus for permission to reprint 'Half-Holiday' by Aldous Huxley and 'Another Temple Gone' by the late C. E. Montague; to Martin Secker for permission to reprint 'Jimmy and the Desperate Woman' by D. H. Lawrence; to Messrs. Constable and Company, Ltd., for permission to reprint 'The Fly' by the late Katherine Mansfield and 'Stripes' by Ethel Colburn Mayne; to Basil Blackwell for permission to reprint 'Storm' by L. A. G. Strong; to Messrs. Macmillan & Co., Ltd., for permission to reprint 'The Enemy in Ambush' by Hugh Walpole; and to J. Middleton Murry for kindly confirming the permission of Messrs. Constable

and Company, Ltd., to reprint a story by the late Katherine Mansfield.

If I have overlooked any name in these acknowledgments, it has been through inadvertence, and I trust that the error will be overlooked.

EDWARD J. O'BRIEN

LOCARNO,
June 28, 1929

MODERN ENGLISH SHORT STORIES

Mr. Franklyn's Adventure[1]

BY JAMES MURRAY ALLISON

'I PERSONALLY have been through an experience so odd, so unusual, and so extraordinary that I find it difficult to make my friends believe it.'

Half a dozen men were smoking and talking late at night in the card-room of a great liner. There was a retired Admiral who told wonderful tales of the sea, a poet known to two continents, a Cambridge Don, a 'Black and Tan' on leave from Ireland, myself, and Mr. Franklyn. Mr. Franklyn had been a listener during the evening, and his contribution came about midnight. He was a little man, with a shiny bald head. He spoke very slowly and very deliberately, and emphasized his points by wagging his forefinger. He told me afterwards that he was second accountant to a firm of grain merchants in Cardiff.

He started his tale with the sentence I have quoted above, and went on: 'It happened in 1916 – during the war, you know. It was either late in June or early in July – I've forgotten the actual date. It may have been in June, or, as I say, in July: I am not sure. It doesn't matter very much really, but I fix the time there or thereabouts because I had occasion to come to London on business, very delicate and intricate business, the details of which I will not trouble you with to-night.

'I was staying at the Strand Palace Hotel, where, believe me, gentlemen, they do you very handsomely. You get a bedroom, quite nicely furnished. There was a picture, I remember, of Marcus Stone's on the wall of the bedroom. I've forgotten the title of the picture, but I can even now see the composition. There was a rustic seat on the left, and on the seat there was a young lady – quite young, about twenty or nineteen, or perhaps twenty-one. She was sitting on the seat – the rustic seat – dressed in some light material – muslin, or something that looked like muslin – reading a letter, obviously a love letter, because on the

[1] From *It Never Rains*, by James Murray Allison, by permission of Messrs. Hurst & Blackett, Ltd.

right of the picture, peeping round a big tree – an elm, I think, or an oak, I've forgotten which – there was a youngish man. He had top-boots on – Wellingtons, you know – and he was looking in her direction, probably *at* her. Anyway, it was plain that the letter that she was reading was from him. Well, you get a bedroom and breakfast – an egg, or a bit of fish, or a rasher of bacon, a cup of tea, or coffee – though I may say that I do not believe in drinking coffee for breakfast. I mean I wouldn't have it stopped – coffee drinking, I mean – but I do hold that coffee is a drink that should come after lunch, or after dinner, but never, never at breakfast. However, that is my own private view about it. I would not force it upon other people.

'They bring the breakfast up on a tray – not a wooden tray. It is of metal of some description, probably iron, though I'm inclined to think it was tin. They have painted flowers on them, not at all badly painted flowers; as a matter of fact, quite nicely painted. I should say they were daisies or pansies or even roses, sometimes a combination of all three, though I have seen –

'Anyway, you get the room – the bedroom with the picture – and the breakfast and a bathroom in the same corridor as the bedroom for six shillings. You did then; it may be a little higher now, but in those days it was six shillings. I can vouch for that, because I stayed there for three days, and my bill was eighteen shillings exactly. You may quote me as to that.'

At this point the retired Admiral, who had been glaring at Franklyn, said: 'And then, sir –'

'Now,' said Franklyn, 'I'm coming to the real story. A friend of mine from Leeds, who, I don't mind telling you, is the chief letter-sorter at one of the Leeds post offices, asked me to lunch at the Victoria Hotel in Northumberland Avenue. It was either the "Victoria" or the "Metropole" or the "Grand." It was one of the three, I'm not quite sure which, because the experience of the day was so strange that I cannot now recollect what hotel it was that we actually did have luncheon at on that day. But this I do know, for reasons which I shall presently state, it was in Northumberland Avenue. Call it the "Victoria," or if you like the "Grand," or even the "Metropole," though on the whole I

rather think we had better call it the "Victoria" – but really it doesn't matter very much so far as this story is concerned.

'Well, I got the letter – the letter from my Leeds friend – inviting me to lunch. There was nothing very remarkable about the letter. It ran something like this:

' "My dear Franklyn,

' "I shall be in London on Tuesday next and, as I hear that you will be in Town on that day, I should like you to have lunch with me at the blank hotel at 1.15."

'I was delighted to accept my friend's invitation, and I wrote him to that effect – a post-card I think it was, but no matter. I will not weary you with the details of how I spent the morning; that has nothing to do with this story, but at 12.45 I came into the Strand Palace Hotel for a wash and a brush-up. I remember going up to my bedroom and ringing for a maid, who very kindly brought me a jug of hot water, and I remember looking round the room – a sort of final look round, you know – and just as I was leaving, I noticed on the mantelpiece a red pencil. It was either a two-H or a three-H, I am not now certain. But of this I am certain: it was an H – *not* a B. And I'll tell you why I'm certain. The B pencils are much blacker and very much softer than the H's. The H is a hard pencil – you know, metallic. Accountants use H's; artists use B's. A cousin of mine is an artist, and he uses B's, *always*. But I use H's – not one-H's, but two or even three-H's. The more H's the harder. And another thing, the H's don't smudge like B's do. You can't have ledgers all smudged up, you know. So that's why accountants use H's.

'Did I tell you that the pencil was red? That is important. It was red. A kind of scarlet – very red. You must get that firmly fixed in your mind; otherwise you will miss the whole point of the story. The pencil was red. By the way, the pencil wasn't round. It had sides to it – six or eight. I've forgotten the number, but probably six. Incidentally, I can't understand people who go about using round pencils, especially accountants. I like 'em with sides on 'em, and this pencil had sides. I don't think it was a Koh-i-noor, nor a Venus; it might have been a Hardtmuth, I cannot now recall. It had "Graphite" on it in gold letters –

capital letters. I'm sure of that, because I remember saying to myself: "Graphite" – it sounded to me like "Dynamite" – you know, the stuff that explodes – dynamite.

'Anyway, the pencil was on the mantelpiece, and I put it into my top waistcoat pocket, and for this reason. I always make notes, always. You never know, you know; so I personally always make notes. I make notes in note-books or on old envelopes. I often cut the sides of envelopes and spread them out to make notes on, though I will say this, it is very awkward to make long notes on the insides of envelopes, because of the gummed parts. The pencil always slips up along the edge and sometimes the notes are difficult to read. On this occasion, however, it didn't matter; I didn't make any notes at all; and for this reason – I lost the pencil!

'That is exactly what happened. I lost the pencil. I remember distinctly putting the pencil into my top right-hand waistcoat pocket; I remember it distinctly – there is no question or doubt about that. When I left the Strand Palace Hotel the red pencil, two or three H's, not round, but with sides to it, with "Graphite" in gold letters, capital letters, stamped upon its end, was in my top right-hand waistcoat pocket. There is, I think, no necessity for me to stress this point, because you will shortly discover from what followed that it must have been there, unless we live in an age of miracles. The theory has been advanced, by the way, that what happened on that day *was* actually a miracle. My friend from Leeds – the letter-sorter – is convinced that it was a miracle, but the evidence is such that barring my forgetfulness in the matter of the actual name of the pencil and the number of H's, there can be nothing miraculous about what followed. I should not describe the thing as a coincidence – that would scarcely do. I simply call it odd, unusual, out of the way, if you like, but not miraculous.

'The facts are plain. I put the pencil into my top right-hand waistcoat pocket before leaving the Strand Palace Hotel to go to lunch with a friend – the letter-sorter from Leeds – at the "Victoria" – call it the "Victoria"; it is no use going into all that again – Hotel in Northumberland Avenue. It was just about one.

The clock at the Law Courts, near the church that Claude Duval hid at after his affair with Nell Gwynne at Simpson's, was under repair, so I can't guarantee the exact time; but it was one, or about one – not very much later, because I turned up at the hotel at about five-past one, and waited for my friend in the vestibule. I didn't know then that I'd lost the pencil – I found out later.'

Franklyn was now very solemnly wagging a forefinger and tapping the edge of the table to emphasize his points.

'Presently, at a quarter-past one, in came my friend from Leeds. We went into the dining-room, and sat down at a small table. Now I don't mind saying that I'm very fond of radishes, and I may say that I made a fairly handsome onslaught on a selection of that dish that the waiter – a dark-looking fellow, probably an Italian, although you never know, he might have been French or Spanish – placed before us. I always eat them with mustard: I am aware that many people prefer pepper and salt, but I like mustard – with radishes I mean. And I'll tell you another thing that I like with mustard – mutton.

'Well, my friend, who, by the way, is a very witty man, didn't take any of the sardines, shredded tomatoes, potato salad, pickled cabbage or, indeed, any of the *hors d'œuvres*. He had ordered fish, I think turbot, but I am not sure; it might have been salmon, but I don't think it was. But whatever it was, it became evident from his manner that he was becoming a little impatient.

'He leant across the table and said to me: "Fairbairn" – that's my Christian name – "Fairbairn," he said – he was obviously hungry – "Fairbairn," he said, "*When they say 'treacle' I shall say 'lick.'* "

'I burst out laughing, burst out laughing – I remember the tears rolling down my cheeks. Then I said: "That's good, very good," and I remember saying distinctly: "I must make a note of that." That is what I said. I said I would make a note of it. I felt for my pencil – the pencil that I've already described to you, the red pencil, the pencil that should have been in my top right-hand waistcoat pocket. It was gone! Believe me, or believe me not, gentlemen, the pencil was not there. It had disappeared! It was gone – lost! I'd lost the pencil! There can be no doubt about the

pencil being in my pocket when I left the Strand Palace Hotel. That I shall shortly prove. There is no question about that. The pencil was in my pocket at one o'clock or thereabouts, but at one-twenty the pencil was not in my pocket. There is no room for discussion on that. The pencil was, shall I say? – "*non est*."

'Now, here comes the strange part of my story. We chatted over lunch. I've forgotten what we talked about. In the circumstances it is not to be wondered at. I must confess that the loss of the pencil had upset me, though I hope that my friend didn't notice it. But it had. I admit it was a trifling matter, but it was odd. I repeat again that there is no confusion about the pencil being in my pocket – none whatever – it certainly was odd. The whole thing is clear *now*, as you will admit that presently, but then it was not so; quite the contrary. Then, it was difficult, impossible to explain. However, we got through lunch somehow, and I hope that there was not in my manner any hint of the loss I had sustained. I think I may say that I kept my end up. It was not till afterwards that I told my friend from Leeds about the loss of the pencil. I wrote to him the next day. I shall never forget his answer. It was a long letter. My friend is a fancier of Pouter Pigeons. As a matter of fact, his Blue Metal Rocky "Gertrude" took the first prize three years running at the Leeds Poultry Show, though why people show pigeons among fowls – Well, he wrote me at some length about Pouters, and referred to my letter to him – the one I sent him about the loss and recovery of the pencil – and I shall never forget what he said about it. He said: "My dear Fairbairn, the recovery of the pencil is little short of a miracle." That is what he said. I've got the letter at home in Cardiff, and any time you like, you can come and see it. Read it – read it for yourselves. I live about a mile and a half from the Cardiff Town Hall, one of the handsomest buildings in the West of England. You get the tram at the corner of High Street, where the tobacconist's shop is. You get the tram – you can't make a mistake; there's a wooden Indian outside the shop – you get the tram there, and in about twenty minutes you are at "The Eagle's Nest." That's the name of my house, "The Eagle's Nest." I've got the letter in a filing cabinet just

outside the living-room in the hall. It is stained oak – the cabinet, I mean. And that is what he says in the letter. "My dear Fairbairn" – my Christian name – he says, "The recovery of the pencil is little short of a miracle." That is what he said.'

By this time the audience had been reduced to pulp. It was the poet who helped us out. He said politely: 'How did you eventually discover the missing pencil?'

'That,' said Mr. Franklyn, 'is the *whole* point of my story. I left my friend from Leeds, whose letter in response to mine I still possess, as I've told you, and any time you may – but I'll not go over that again – I left him at the end of Northumberland Avenue; not the end near the National Liberal Club; the other end, where that fellow is – now what is his name? Everybody knows it. God bless my soul, I'll forget my own name one of these days! What *is* that fellow's name?'

'Do you mean Phillips, the nautical instrument maker?' said the Admiral.

'No, no,' said Franklyn. 'He's much more important. It's – it's –'

'I know,' said the poet, 'it's Jameson's, the book shop.'

'Don't be a damn' fool,' said Franklyn. 'The man I mean is in Trafalgar Square – actually in the Square. Everybody knows him.'

'I know,' said I. 'Hepple, the chemist.'

Franklyn got quite angry. 'No, not Hepple. He doesn't keep a shop, the man I mean. He's up on a pedestal, a column. Now what *is* his name?'

Said the Admiral, faintly: 'You don't refer to Nelson?'

'Yes,' said Franklyn. 'That's the chap! That's the end of Northumberland Avenue, where he is, that I parted from my friend from Leeds. The nature of our parting is not important. I left him on the corner and walked back to the Strand Palace Hotel. I walked upon the left-hand side of the Strand, past the Post Office, past Horne Brothers' shop, past the ABC, past Lyons's, past Dunn, the hatter, where the medical statues are, though I cannot see why *The Daily Express* made such a fuss about them, and past the Adelphi Theatre. There was a play on.

I cannot remember now what it was, but it is of no importance. Now, here's the point.

'When I got to Romano's – a restaurant facing the Cecil Hotel – I happened to glance quite casually into the gutter, and I noticed a gleam of red – in the gutter. I paused. I, as a matter of fact, stopped. I looked; I stooped down, and what do you think, gentlemen, I discovered lying in the gutter outside Romano's Restaurant? My pencil! My red pencil – the very pencil that I have been telling you about! There it was; lying in the gutter outside Romano's Restaurant – in the gutter. My pencil; there it was. It must have slipped from my pocket when passing an hour or two previously. As I say, it must have slipped from my pocket.

'I have often thought about it, about the whole thing. I can find no other explanation. The pencil, my red pencil, that I took from the mantelpiece in my bedroom at the Strand Palace Hotel just before I left to take lunch with my friend from Leeds, and with which, you will remember, I meant to take notes; the H pencil (two or three H's) with six or eight sides to it, and stamped with the word "Graphite" in gold letters. (You will remember that it reminded me of the word "dynamite" – an explosive.) The pencil had obviously fallen from my pocket and rolled out into the gutter – rolled into the gutter, from my pocket, when I was walking from the Strand Palace Hotel to take lunch with my friend. I shall never forget it.

'There is only one explanation: the pencil must have fallen from my pocket. Just that. I must have dropped it. There cannot be any other explanation.'

There was a long silence. The Admiral was looking at Mr. Franklyn with a very peculiar expression upon his face. He was, I think, making up his mind to say something. What it was I do not know, because Franklyn said with an air of finality: 'Well, gentlemen, that's my story. I tell you the facts, I add nothing, I subtract nothing. I have elaborated no incident of that day's adventure. I've told you the thing exactly as it happened to me. What do you think of it?'

Nobody told him.

The Idealist[1]

BY MARY ARDEN

On those fine, soft, delicious summer evenings they would sit out after supper on the little veranda that overlooked the street, and while Sylvia did some sort of sewing for the child at school, Harold lay back luxuriously in his deck-chair – not smoking; he didn't like smoking – and thought how frightfully unsatisfactory life with Sylvia was. Simply you were an accessory; that was all.

He looked at the little hard line from her nose to her upper lip and wondered how on earth he had managed to be so foolish. But then he was such a hopelessly impetuous sort of fellow. But was he? Was that quite it? No, he defied anyone not to have fallen to the lift of that same little upper lip as it *used* to lift in the old days, when she turned her head slowly and spoke to him: 'Harold?' with faint questioning. And always underneath the real words she had seemed to him to be asking: 'Won't you give me a kiss?' Yes, yes, of course he would, and he would stroke her arm – even if he'd wanted to do that now she'd have had an objection. Only the other evening in the Stockwells' garden he had had, well – quite a special feeling about her again, and in the half-darkness and the fragrance that there was under the magnolia tree he had tried to draw her close to him.

'This is quite like old days, isn't it, old girl?'

'What? Oh, quite.' She laughed awkwardly and moved a little away from him on the seat. And then, for some reason, he felt like a little boy who *had* tried hard to be good, and this was what he got.

§

This was what he got. Oh, well he would go down and stay the week-end with the Macfarlanes. It was wonderful how

[1] From *Luck and Other Stories*, by Mary Arden, by permission of Messrs. Jonathan Cape, Ltd.

warmed, how comforted, how *at home* he felt with Edith. Of course, what one wants more than anything else in this world is to be understood, and when one finds that at last after years and years. . . . Well, then one is justified in going almost any lengths, isn't one? And all the old fogies who raise their eyebrows aren't worth a snap of the fingers and simply they are jealous. Jealous.

'What do you think?' He took Bessie – not Edith – out on to the cliffs, and they sat down on the short grass. 'Have I a chance? Would it be the slightest good, do you think, for me to ask her to – to come with me? I've told her about Sylvia and all that, and she was so sympathetic and so – so –' he waved his shaking agitated hand, 'wonderful, you know, that I have a feeling she might not mind. Do you think I could try, Bessie? I'll go by you.'

'Oh, *no*.' Bessie bit hard on a little piece of dry grass. 'I shouldn't dream of going by me. I'm so young, and I've had no experience. Really none – none at all.'

'And besides everything else she's so frightfully pretty. You know I'm extraordinarily bowled over by beauty – exceptionally so, I dare say.'

'Oh,' said Bessie, 'what do you do when you're bowled over?'

'Do?' he glanced at her a little suspiciously, 'I – well, I – " He paused, thinking, staring ahead.

'Ah!' His eyes opened wide with astonishment at the recollection. 'When I suddenly came out from that gap in the hills by the Hog's Back and saw – everything, you know – stretched out before me, I *fell over*.'

'Fell over?' said Bessie, very concerned. 'But didn't you hurt yourself?'

'No, no, no, I didn't hurt myself. I didn't hurt myself.' Suddenly he was quite abstracted. He looked away to where, balancing half-way up the cliff, there was a wooden shanty with a corrugated iron roof, and a painted notice across one wall:

LOBSTER AND PRAWN TEAS. LUNCHEONS

A yellow path with an insufficient-looking wooden railing led down to this abode. Everything seemed deserted. There wasn't

a soul on the smooth velvety grass by the gorse bushes, or in the little bay far below. Only where sea and sky joined together in a greyish-blue, half-sunny mist, there was a faint something that might be a sail.

'I shouldn't be surprised,' remarked Bessie, 'if you fell over *now*.' But Harold said with animation:

'Lobster teas! I say! Let's go round there, shall we, and see what they can do?' And over the thick white cups, yellow cake, watercress – no lobster or prawns, of course – he looked at Bessie passionately but abstractedly.

'If only I'd met Edith years ago,' he said, 'years ago, you've no idea what misery might have been saved – no idea. My dear child,' he went on in the voice of a father, 'you're so young, you know. You simply can't realize things like that – simply can't, whereas *I* . . .'

§

Ah, what hopes! How could poor Harold tell that once he'd set up house with Edith who was so wonderfully soft and fair and fresh as a flower, and so – so sweet to him, she'd begin, so to speak, to rub all the little hairs on his body up the wrong way? Ah, how could he?

At first he pretended that it was his imagination and that everything was all right really.

'You're a fool, my dear chap,' he told himself, 'to expect the girl to – er – to be perfect, and anyhow, what *is* wrong, if you're being so particular?' But, ah, only too well he knew.

He knew, for instance, that he couldn't stand that little lace cap she wore at breakfast with blue ribbon rabbits' ears. (Altogether she liked *that* sort of thing too much. His own dressing-room was like a blessed boudoir – all soft and pink and cossetty.) And he knew he couldn't stand those awful little jokes she made over and over again and always in the same voice, a trifle arch, a trifle innocent.

'Let me see – do you take sugar, darling?'

'No, no, dear, thank you – never –'

'Oh dear, how silly of me! Of course. You're *far* too sweet as it is.'

Good Lord! But worse than anything, he felt, was the fuss she made over his clothes. That he could *not* stand. He would come home a rag from the office, absolutely a rag, you know, and when at last he had got through the sit-up dinner and established himself in his comfortable chair by the drawing-room fire, she would say:

'Harold, I really *do* think you might wear your patent leathers in the evening instead of those perfectly desperate old slippers.'

'Oh, you think so?' said Harold mournfully, and, lifting one foot a little from the fender, he turned it this way and that. Of course, it was not beautiful, clad like that in a beloved brown and fawn check slipper, wide as a foot-muff – Sylvia had at one time called those slippers the 'Three Bear slippers' – but, hang it all, when a chap came back from the office more dead than alive – an – an absolute walking ghost. . . .

'You know, Edith, old girl,' he said, as if taking her into his confidence, 'I think you make a great deal too much fuss about dress.'

'Oh, do I?' She drained her coffee-cup and her beautifully manicured fingers gleamed. 'Do I? But I fancy you'd rather look like a gentleman than a – a –'

'Gentleman!' he cried, suddenly very vehement. 'Gentleman!' His eyes stared at her quite terrifyingly. 'Don't you know that a gentleman can wear anything, *anything*, and it doesn't matter? Good God, my dear girl, if he likes he can be like Lord Patterson and *never* wear anything but sand-shoes and a tie right round by his ear!'

What effect? He waited anxiously. Bad, if any, for his remark had fallen on to a dead, rather ominous silence. His excitement cooled. He went over to Edith and passed his hand very gently over her neck and cheek.

'Sorry, Edie, sorry, old girl!' She blinked, and her hand on the chair-arm quivered a little. 'I'm a rum chap, I know, but I don't mean it, really, really not. Won't you play to me a little? I'm tired, and I do so adore your playing.'

'All right,' she said, 'if – if you really want me to, I will. All right.'

Well, there was one thing very nice; decidedly Edith *could* play. And here Harold prepared to enjoy himself by undoing the three bottom buttons of his waistcoat, undoing the top button of his trousers, kicking off his slippers, and closing his eyes.

But ah, that Beethoven thing she played was so desperately, so terribly tragic that wretched Harold began to feel it was the wailing of his own tormented soul. Or, no, not only his own perhaps, but the wailings of all poor wretched men who thought they had found the ideal woman and instead were disappointed, miserable, lonely.

Good God! Intolerable. Simply he couldn't stand it, so before she'd even finished he got up, muttered 'Good night,' and retired to his boudoir-like dressing-room.

Very carefully he wound up his watch and put it on the chest of drawers; he slowly undid two brace buttons, he took his big coloured silk handkerchief out of his pocket, stared at it pensively a moment or two, and then, behold! it was needed to wipe away two enormous tears, for, as it happened, Harold was not one of those people who *cannot* weep. On the contrary.

Now he covered his face entirely with the handkerchief. He rocked to and fro, he said into it:

'Lonely to my grave, I suppose . . . lonely to my grave.'

§

Oh, well, it was really pretty obvious, wasn't it, that this very awful state of affairs could *not* go on?

'Simply cannot,' Harold would say, blinking and running his fingers through his hair.

And then suddenly one day it dawned on him that there remained one way of treating life he hadn't yet tried. He couldn't say it appealed to him exactly, not at first sight, anyhow, but still, there was nothing like having a try. He'd get into it with practice, and it was very . . . noble.

It was the heroic way.

Most likely it would just mean taking hold of an attitude firmly and then all would be plain sailing. He'd have to sink himself in his profession, become a slave to it – a slave working for the good of humanity. He'd have to put all thought of women *as* women out of his head. To Edith he'd be tolerant, kind, protective; he might even manage to get quite fond of her again in a detached sort of way. Oh, yes, this was what he must do.

So when he was at the office he began to look about him with alert eyes, very wide open, to fuss about single words being altered in the reports, to talk to the girl typists in a loud, business-like voice.

'Now then, Miss Pinkerton, haven't you finished that letter yet? I've been waiting for it at least a quarter of an hour.' No answer. 'At least a quarter of an hour.'

She lifted her head as if it were heavy and looked at him. There was a very faint twitch at the corner of her mouth.

'I'm sorry,' she said.

Was she laughing at him? He couldn't be sure. Anyhow, her eyes were quite serious. Dark, soft, full of the most extraordinary thing you could only call expression, though you hunted frenziedly about in your mind for another word.

Temperament, he had decided by lunch-time, but when he had climbed up to the top of the 'bus in the evening and was going – well, going back – he thought that that was altogether too vague, and wouldn't do at all. . . . He thought again. . . . A soft wind blew, and there was a spring sky the colour of primroses. He saw himself talking to Miss Pinkerton and asking her:

'Do you know what it is to be misunderstood?'

She looked up quickly. 'Oh, yes.'

'Well, so do I, you know. . . . Shall we be friends?'

She looked down again, put her head a little on one side, played with the keys of the typewriter, her mouth twitched. 'All right. Yes. If you like.'

Ah, and why not? Fortune behaves like that sometimes. When you have almost played away your last halfpenny, then at last the luck turns. At last!

He saw himself standing with her in meadows impossibly

full of flowers, picnicking under the delicious shade of trees, paddling with her in brooks, drying – yes, drying her feet himself with the towel. Asking her if she wouldn't, just to please him, let down her lovely hair.

But as it happened he took her not out into the country but to the theatre. You would think she had never been to the theatre before – the way she enjoyed it.

At that moment which Harold always had thought thrilling, when the orchestra was playing and all the lights had gone out except the green and blue footlights, she communicated such extraordinary excitement to him, he didn't know what to do. And when they were eating Neapolitan ices together in the interval, he said, 'Jolly good, aren't they?' and licked his spoon, feeling a schoolboy, and she said 'Rather!' and laughed suddenly with flushed cheeks. (Of course she was wonderfully young – only a child.) And when the poor misunderstood hero of the play realized, standing at twilight in his magnificent park-like garden, that there was 'no hope . . . no hope . . .' Harold very nearly put a trembling hand on to Miss Pinkerton's. But no, he was not going to do anything so rash. With the *real thing* so nearly within your grasp you did well to be careful, to wait – quite a long time if need be.

§

So impressed was he with the need for waiting and for doing everything properly and in order, that he decided to take his cousin Sophie, whom he had always thought an extraordinarily intelligent woman, into his confidence.

He rang the bell of Sophie's little flat just at tea-time and she opened the door to him herself.

She wore a black silk dress, tight in the bodice and full in the skirt. Her fair hair was drawn back from the ears and piled high up on to her head. She raised her very exquisitely fine eyebrows.

'Why, it's ages since you've been to see me, Harold! Tea's just ready and I was going to have sultana cake.'

He thought she seemed pleased.

'Want to consult you, Sophie,' he said.

'Oh, by all means, only come in and have tea first.'

He left his coat and hat in the passage and went into her cosy little sitting-room, but as for getting through tea first –! He was just lifting up his first slice of thin bread and butter when words came rushing out of him like water from a burst dam.

'. . . and you see what I mean, Sophie? You see – it'd be like getting a little bit of youth back again. Marvellous. Oh, I can't describe to you what it would mean, and yet I felt I *must* consult you about it first; must have your opinion first. You – you can see that, can't you?'

'Yes, I see.'

'You *do* see?'

'Yes . . . but Harold, my dear,' Sophie's voice was cool, quiet, calm, 'you haven't *thought* about it much, have you?'

'Thought about it!' cried Harold. 'Thought about it! Why, I've done nothing else day or night, day or night –'

'No, no, I don't mean in that way. What I mean is you haven't thought much about her point of view. Why, she's only a child, and if she's as lovely as you say she is, there must be ever so many people in love with her who are – well, more suitable – more her own age and not married in the first place. You know, Harold, my dear, you'd be going the best way to ruin her life – ruin it. Think of that. Of course, if she were older and so on, but as it is . . .'

The waters closed over Harold's head.

'Well,' he said, with awful dejection, 'I suppose you're right. I can't do it. I can't ruin her life.'

A strained pause.

'I'll go lonely to my grave, I suppose – lonely to my grave.'

Sophie was a little astonished at his having arrived so quickly at this decision. She felt almost guilty. She said:

'But, Harold dear, I feel sure you'd have come to that decision without me sooner or later, you know.'

'Should I, do you think? Should I?' he said, brightening a little.

'Oh, I'm sure.'

'Ah,' he said, laughing a little with haggard eyes, 'there's

simply no accounting for me. I'm a rum chap – a rum chap. Why,' he added, 'to think of it! Only next Saturday I'd planned to take her out into the country in my little car, and God knows what a marvellous time we might have had. . . . Ah, well, I mustn't think any more about the country now. I must stick to London, stick to my job.'

'But,' said Sophie, after a pause, 'I shouldn't have thought you need give up the idea of the country altogether. Why, it's such lovely weather, too.'

'My dear girl – country's no place all by oneself.'

'No, no, no, of course.'

Another pause. Then she said boldly, though her voice was the least little bit breathless, the least little bit strained:

'But, Harold dear, if you think you could put up with me, I – I'd love to come with you sometime; to – to be a sister to you. After all,' she added, apologetically, 'we've known each other such a long while.'

'Well,' he said, 'that's very good of you, Sophie,' and he was quite touched.

§

So they went. Several times he took her out into the country in his little car, and she wore funny becoming little hats with a bunch of cherries or flowers dropping down over one ear, and as soon as it was warm enough, print dresses that made her look such a girl, and Harold put on a favourite, desperately old tweed coat of his that was actually beginning to fray right out at one elbow.

'*You* don't mind my wearing my old things, do you?' he said, and laughed.

'No, no, of course I don't mind . . . only I do feel I'd rather like to *mend* them for you, you know.'

And they had tea together at little rustic tea-places, when, more often than not, the conversation became intellectual, which is to say, Harold poured his views on all his favourite subjects into her wonderfully sympathetic ears.

'Well, Sophie,' he would say to her on the way home, 'what a

treat it is to talk to a really clever woman. It is indeed. . . .' And it seemed to him that he was always discovering more and more wonderful things about Sophie, that he'd never before realized were there. He began to feel that with her, more than with anyone else, he was talking to an equal, sympathized with, and, by God! . . . Yes, by God, understood! Really and truly understood. The word was a revelation in itself. Understood. Light dawned, so dazzlingly bright, in fact, that he could hardly see the report he was working on at the moment. All his life he'd been a fool – blind, idiotic, childish. God, what a fool!

He took out his watch with a trembling hand.

A quarter to one.

Damn it! He'd promised to have lunch with that chap Goodwin. Must go.

Still – very fortunate – he was a nice fellow, and when they'd got as far as the veal cutlets, Harold stopped answering his flow of talk with 'Yes! no! Yes! no!' and unburdened himself.

'Of course, you know, I feel it's the thing I've waited for all my life,' he said.

'I expect you do,' said Goodwin gruffly. He was a little man with a red, round face.

'And now that it's come, I feel I'd be nothing but a fool if I – if I let it slip. Goodwin, my dear man, for heaven's sake tell me what you think! I'll go by you.'

'Go by me?' said Goodwin incredulously.

'Yes, yes, yes, I'll go by you.'

'Then,' cried Goodwin with immense energy, and he banged the table so hard that everything rattled – but not impatiently, no, not impatiently; he was such a nice fellow, 'my dear man, for God's sake take the risk, and – and I hope you'll be happy.'

Harold grasped Goodwin's plump fist across the table.

''Ternally grateful to you,' he said in a shaking voice. ''Ternally grateful. I'll go right off now.'

He jumped into a taxi and shouted through the window:

'Drive as fast as you possibly can!' And, feeling as if something were going to burst inside him, arrived at Sophie's flat.

For one awful moment the idea possessed him: supposing she's

not in! He felt that positively he would die there and then if she were not in, but she came to the door quite quickly, and he thought she looked as if she'd been expecting him – that was to say, almost as if she had.

Ten minutes later they were sitting on her blue and orange sofa, and he was stroking her arm up and down.

'Oh, my darling,' he said, looking first at her face and then at the arm he was stroking. His voice shook. 'If only I'd realized years ago – if only I'd not been such a crass, God-forsaken idiot, then all my life would have been different, wonderful. All that awful past need never have happened at all!'

'Well, Harold dear,' said Sophie, 'you'll have to forget all about the past now, won't you?' And considering – well, considering everything, you know – her voice was wonderfully cool.

Mrs. Lovelace[1]

BY MARTIN ARMSTRONG

I

WHEN the master of the house dies, the blinds are drawn, and the house is closed in upon itself, its life governed by the unforgettable presence in the room upstairs. But after the dead man has been carried downstairs and borne to his grave, the house opens its eyes again upon the world and little by little renews its ordered rhythm. Such a thing had befallen me. I had crouched, dumb and blind, like a darkened house before the one absorbing fact of my disaster. And when at last I began to look outwards again I felt that new scenes and bodily exercise were necessary to enable me to regain possession of myself. Then, as I groped rather faint-heartedly for a plan, I remembered that six-days' walk I had taken ten years ago – fifty years ago it seemed now – through the valleys and among the hills of that remote country-side when autumn was slowly and gorgeously burning itself out. That autumnal countryside had remained in my memory as a sanctuary to which my mind could return again and again for refreshment; and as in the course of time the actual details had faded, the sensation of the place had become intensified, till now it returned to me more as a rich melody than as an assemblage of tangible facts. Then, as my mind was submerged once more in that mellow atmosphere – that old, inevitable, never-ending tune – it penetrated to the heart of the thing, the person who had been for me the meaning, the reality, of which all those enchanting things were only the symbols, and like the return of swallows in the spring, detail after detail came back into my memory, building up again the whole experience.

It was during the last days of my holiday that I had met Mrs. Lovelace. In a morning sharp with dew and bright with sunshine, I had climbed to a great undulating heath, a rolling sea of copper-coloured bracken that spread like a double tide to

[1] From *The Bazaar, and Other Stories*, by Martin Armstrong, by permission of Messrs. Jonathan Cape, Ltd.

either margin of the moorland road and foamed about the feet of sombre firs which dotted the heath with rare islands. From there at noon the road dropped towards the valley again; trees crowded up to its edges and stood there, many-shaped and many-coloured, in hanging cascades of crimson and orange, sudden puffs of scarlet fire, or upward leaping fountains of blond foam. At the bottom of the valley the road skirted a small tree-girdled lake, round and deep like a great inverted dome, in whose concavity the burning colours of the trees were blurred and melted in the dark transparency of the water. And long after the lake had passed behind me, I had come upon that lonely inn by the roadside and knew from my map that I was now eight miles from the village where I had planned to pass the night. Then, as I continued on my way, I began to regret my swift passage, and to think that I should do better to stay the night at the inn I had just passed and so linger a little among those surroundings. Just as I had resolved to do so, I came upon her round a bend of the road. At first the freedom and alertness of her step made me think she was a girl, and even when we came face to face her bright complexion and clear eyes would have confirmed the belief had it not been for her white hair and something calm and mature in her expression which was beautiful beyond the beauty of youth. As an excuse to speak to her, I stopped and asked her about the inn, and when she told me that she lived there it was one reason the more that I should break my journey there.

And a delightful inn it was – a little tumbledown place, yet everything about it was charming: the landlord with his humourous, weather-beaten face; the landlady shy, dark-haired, and quietly attentive to one's well-being; and their child Mary, a lovely little girl of eight, half flower, half confiding little animal. But the most noticeable thing about them was their affection for Mrs. Lovelace. It was she, one felt, who was the mainspring of the whole affair. It was somehow because of her that the landlord was so friendly and so comical, the landlady so anxious that you should be happy, and the child such a lovable little creature. Yes, evidently Mrs. Lovelace had enchanted the place. When she came into the room, one felt an access of well-being; when she

left it, it was as though some one had blown out a light. And she was always entering and leaving the room, busy, it seemed, about lending a hand with the housework. Sometimes she would flit in and up to a cupboard carrying plates and glasses, or pass – a sudden apparition – from one door to another leading a dog, or her light footstep would cross the ceiling, her clear voice call from the garden at the back of the house. And whenever one saw her or heard her, one felt a glow of satisfaction. There was no resisting, and I too was drawn into the scheme – became yet another satellite revolving round that central radiance; and I lingered there for days, unwilling to exile myself from such a delicious state of things. One laughed and talked and enjoyed one's food, or told fairy-stories to the little girl – all because of Mrs. Lovelace: and none of the stories told was more enchantingly impossible than the actual life that we led there.

On the day of my departure an old parson turned up for lunch; he had walked over from his vicarage four miles away. He was received as an old friend, it was almost as if they were expecting him, and we all sat down together to a jovial lunch. My road to the station lay through his village, and when I set off on my eight miles' walk he went with me.

'Well,' he said, after we had finished our good-byes and were getting into our stride, 'I hope you have fallen in love with Mrs. Lovelace?'

'Certainly I have,' I replied.

'That's right,' he said. 'Everybody does.'

'I can hardly imagine the place existing without her,' I went on. 'The inn, the landlord, his wife, and that delightful little child, the whole delicious life of the place seem to me . . . well, simply reflections, manifestations of Mrs. Lovelace.'

'And yet,' said the parson, 'there was a time – nearly half a century ago, it is true – before she came. I knew her as a child of six, and twelve years later I remember her coming to the inn, a mere girl still, with her husband. She had bolted with him, God bless her. Her people had refused their consent: he had no money – she hadn't much: two hundred a year, I believe – and he was considered to be beneath her in station. So he was. But he was as

fine a young fellow as you could wish to meet: in the Mercantile Marine: he had signed on with a ship in the China trade which was off in a few weeks' time on a five years' voyage, and her people insisted – hoping, of course, that the affair would blow over altogether – that they should at least wait till he returned. I didn't sympathize with their views. The two young people were head over ears in love, and, as I said, he was a first-rate chap, one in ten thousand. So I was delighted, despite my cloth, when I heard one afternoon that she had packed up and bolted with him. They came to the inn for their honeymoon, and when the time came for him to go she stayed on there during the five years of his absence, cheerfully awaiting his return. And at last he was back again – back for a couple of months. You met them together all over the country doing day-long rambles together. Their perfect happiness was visible to all. Every one knew them and looked out for them, deriving a sort of reflected happiness from the sight of them. Then he went away again, but this time he never came back. It was fever he died of, I believe, somewhere in the China Sea. I was afraid it would be the end of her; but I was wrong, absurdly wrong, for after the first shock she rallied and soon recovered herself completely. It seemed – how can I express it? – as if their happiness in one another had not been destroyed by his death, but rather that it remained with her, not as a mere memory, a consolation to be found only by introspective brooding, but as a living reality. You remember the words of Christ: "I am the water of life: he that drinketh of Me shall never thirst." So it is with Mrs. Lovelace: she tasted once of perfect happiness and, as you see, she still has enough not only for herself but also for the whole countryside. I turn up, as I turned up to-day, once a month, to renew my supply.'

We parted, the old parson and I, when we reached his village.

'Good-bye, good-bye,' he said. 'And don't forget to go back to the inn when your supply runs short.' He stood with one hand on his gate, and, waving the other to me, vanished out of my life. . . .

II

Like a diver curving up from his cool rush through dim water into a dazzle of sunlight, I came up out of my dip into the past and awoke to the desolation of my unhappy present. The old boy's words were still in my mind. Certainly now, if ever, my supply had run short. What could be better, then, than to go back to the inn and Mrs. Lovelace? I looked out trains and packed my knapsack.

When, having reached my destination, I left the slow little train to draw its plume of smoke among the harvests of the valley and made my way uphill into the heart of the country, I felt that I had stepped straight back into that life into which I had dipped for a few days ten years ago. Yet it was not exactly the same, because everything about me exhaled that poignant and baffling intensity, that more-than-reality, with which scenes revisited after a long interval sometimes assail the senses. The still fires and standing fountains of autumn filled the country, as before, with a transforming splendour; unmoving, everlasting, it would have seemed under the still autumn sunshine, if here and there a red leaf floating vertically to the ground had not portended the beginning of change. The days were cloudless as ten years ago, and when I reached the small, dark lake it was incredibly, piercingly the same. I could almost have believed that the colours of those blurred and mingled reflections had never faded from its round deep mirror but had smouldered on for ten years as they had smouldered, half-forgotten but unextinguished, in my mind. And all the time I kept expecting to meet Mrs. Lovelace: at every turn in the road, at every opening in the trees, I kept wondering that she did not appear. I remembered the old parson's story. 'You met them,' he had said, 'all over the country, doing long rambles together.' And that country lived in my memory so entirely as part of the mind of Mrs. Lovelace, that it seemed irrational that the old scenes should reappear and yet she be absent.

When I reached the inn the sun had already gone down, but it was hardly dusk enough to draw the blinds, so that to find the

inn with its blinds drawn and its windows dark came to me as a shock. But as I rounded the house I saw an upstairs window – hers, I was sure – brightly illuminated, with the blind still undrawn, and at once I felt reassured; it was so typical of her and her relation to the inn. Yet it was strange and not so typical, I reflected, that the light should all be concentrated into one room and the rest of the place should be dark. And when I entered it was stranger still, for there was dimness and silence. It was as though some one had blown out a candle. At the sound of my feet the landlady appeared. Her face chilled me to the bone. It was not that she received me coldly: though she did not at first recognize me – and how should she, so changed as I was? – her greeting had the same quiet kindness. But I missed something in her face, and again the phrase came to me 'as though some one had blown out a candle.' In a voice I could hardly control, I asked after Mrs. Lovelace.

'She's gone,' she replied.

'Gone?' I said. 'Left you for good?'

She nodded.

'Surely you did not quarrel?'

'How could we quarrel?' she answered with a quivering smile. She said no more, and I dared not question her further.

'And the child?' I asked. At that a light flickered for a moment in her eyes.

'Mary was married yesterday,' she answered. The door opened, and the landlord came in and we sat, all three, in the twilight, talking over the fire. In him too I felt that withdrawal of the former flame which I had felt from the moment of my arrival both in the landlady and in the whole atmosphere of the inn. His old humour was numbed and muted, a ghost of its former joviality. Again and again the name of Mrs. Lovelace rose to my lips, and always something in myself, something in them, deprived me of courage to speak of her. Even when the landlady went upstairs to prepare my room, the landlord and I talked only of other things.

When she returned, I went up to wash and take off my dusty boots.

'The same room as last time,' she told me, with a faint smile. 'The second on the left.'

I climbed the stairs. A floor-board at the stair-head wheezed beneath my foot – a sharp, familiar reminder of my former visit, but in the semi-darkness of the passage my memory failed me for a moment, and when at last I opened the door which I thought was mine, a surprising vision confronted me, for the room was brightly illuminated and full of a rich scent. Candles shone on the mantelpiece and in the mirror behind them their reflections answered them with a milder and more misty glow. There were more candles on the table, and as my eyes grew accustomed to the soft brightness, I saw in a corner of the room an arbour of autumnal boughs, scarlet, orange, and crimson, built like a canopy above the bed. Then with a shock I saw beneath the carefully-spread white counterpane the mould of a human body. My eyes ran up to the pillow, but on the pillow I could see nothing but a cluster of large white lilies. There was a soft footfall behind me. It was the landlady with a candle in her hand. She closed the door and came up to me. 'Come and look,' she whispered, and with her I approached the bed on tiptoe and found between the lilies what I had expected to find – the face of Mrs. Lovelace. The pallor of death had not diminished its beauty, indeed it had added a touch of frail youthfulness which was not there before. The thick hair drawn back from her temples shone in the yellow candlelight not white but the fairest flaxen. It was as though she had become a girl again. And so happy, so serene was her expression that it was impossible, as we stood looking at her, to feel otherwise than happy and serene.

'Those lilies,' said the landlady, 'are what Mary carried at her wedding.' She attended to the candles and smoothed the edge of the pillow as though for a sleeper, and we went out together.

'Come down into the kitchen,' she said, 'and I'll tell you all that happened.'

'Two years ago,' she began, when I was seated between her and her husband before the fire, 'when Mary was eighteen, she and a young fellow near here began courting. He was such a good boy in every way that we were glad, in spite of the fact that he

was so poor that, even with what we could give Mary, there was no hope that they would be able to wed for years. Two years went by and they were fonder than ever of each other, but he was as far as ever, seemingly, from earning anywhere near enough to keep a wife. Then, one day not long ago, he came along to say that he was going to Australia. A cousin of his father's had offered him a place there and it seemed the only chance of getting a paying job.

'Mary did her best to take it reasonable-like, but you could see how hard it hit her. At the end of the week the poor child was as pinched and pale as if she had been at death's door. It was then that our dear Mrs. Lovelace stepped in. She had only waited, seemingly, to make quite sure of them, and now she simply said that Mary's boy was not to go to Australia but stay at home and get married at once, because she was going to give them her own money. "You know my story," she said, "well, the best part of that is going to happen over again." That was a month ago. It was arranged that the two should be wedded yesterday. But a fortnight ago Mrs. Lovelace was taken bad. We never dreamt it was serious till she got worse and we sent for the doctor. She knew she was dying, but the idea of that didn't trouble her at all, and she remained her old self almost to the end. "Don't worry," she said. "I shan't die till after they're married," and she wouldn't let us change the arrangements.

'Yesterday – the day of the wedding, that is – I sat with her while they all went to the church, and when it was over my man came up and gave us an account of it, and she listened to it all, as pleased and interested as could be. Then in the evening the two young ones came and sat with her. She knew them, although she was almost past speaking by that time, but when they said good-night to her she whispered something to Mary. "It's for you now, Mary," she said, "to keep the inn going." Now what could she mean by that, do you think? Nothing, most likely, for I reckon her poor mind was wandering. Soon after the young ones left her she fell asleep and slept on without a break till, just after midnight, as I was sitting by her bed, I heard a little catch in her breath. I turned, but her breathing had begun again,

only more softly now. Then twenty minutes later, there was another little catch and after that the breathing did not recommence.'

The dusk had deepened during the landlady's story and when she finished we sat in darkness. Then there came a sound of wheels on the road. 'It's Mary,' said the landlady, and she rose eagerly and lighted the lamp: but it was the change in their faces that amazed me more than the growing light of the lamp, for all that I had missed there till then flowed visibly back like the lighting of many candles. There was a step, a click of the latch, and Mary stood in the doorway like an apparition, with the gold of her hair shining in the lamplight. And suddenly, not because of any bodily resemblance, but in some subtle, inexplicable, spiritual way, I seemed to be again in the magical presence of Mrs. Lovelace.

Where was Wych Street?[1]

BY STACY AUMONIER

In the public bar of the 'Wagtail,' in Wapping, four men and a woman were drinking beer and discussing diseases. It was not a pretty subject, and the company was certainly not a handsome one. It was a dark November evening, and the dingy lighting of the bar seemed but to emphasize the bleak exterior. Drifts of fog and damp from without mingled with the smoke of shag. The sanded floor was kicked into a muddy morass not unlike the surface of the pavement. An old lady down the street had died from pneumonia the previous evening, and the event supplied a fruitful topic of conversation. The things that one could get! Everywhere were germs eager to destroy one. At any minute the symptoms might break out. And so – one foregathered in a cheerful spot amidst friends and drank forgetfulness.

Prominent in this little group was Baldwin Meadows, a sallow-faced villain with battered features and prominent cheek-bones, his face cut and scarred by a hundred fights. Ex-seaman, ex-boxer, ex-fish-porter – indeed, to everyone's knowledge, ex-everything. No one knew how he lived. By his side lurched an enormous coloured man who went by the name of Harry Jones. Grinning above a tankard sat a pimply faced young man who was known as 'the Agent.' Silver rings adorned his fingers. He had no other name, and most emphatically no address, but he 'arranged things' for people, and appeared to thrive upon it in a scrambling, fugitive manner. The other two people were Mr. and Mrs. Dawes. Mr. Dawes was an entirely negative person, but Mrs. Dawes shone by virtue of a high, whining, insistent voice, keyed to within half a note of hysteria.

Then, at one point, the conversation suddenly took a peculiar turn. It came about through Mrs. Dawes mentioning that her aunt, who died from eating tinned lobster, used to work in a corset shop in Wych Street. When she said that, 'the Agent,'

[1] From *Miss Bracegirdle and Others*, by Stacy Aumonier, by permission of Messrs. Hutchinson & Co. (Publishers), Ltd.

whose right eye appeared to survey the ceiling, whilst his left eye looked over the other side of his tankard, remarked:

'Where was Wych Street, ma?'

'Lord!' exclaimed Mrs. Dawes. 'Don't you know, dearie? You must be a young 'un, you must. Why, when I was a gal everyone knew Wych Street. It was just down there where they built the Kingsway, like.'

Baldwin Meadows cleared his throat and said:

'Wych Street used to be a turnin' runnin' from Long Acre into Wellington Street.'

'Oh, no, old boy,' chipped in Mr. Dawes, who always treated the ex-man with great deference. 'If you'll excuse me, Wych Street was a narrow lane at the back of the old Globe Theatre, that used to pass by the church.'

'I know what I'm talkin' about,' growled Meadows.

Mrs. Dawes's high nasal whine broke in:

'Hi, Mr. Booth, you used ter know yer wye abaht. Where was Wych Street?'

Mr. Booth, the proprietor, was polishing a tap. He looked up.

'Wych Street? Yus, of course I knoo Wych Street. Used to go there with some of the boys when I was Covent Garden way. It was at right angles to the Strand, just east of Wellington Street.'

'No, it warn't. It were alongside the Strand, before yer come to Wellington Street.'

The coloured man took no part in the discussion, one street and one city being alike to him, provided he could obtain the material comforts dear to his heart; but the others carried it on with a certain amount of acerbity.

Before any agreement had been arrived at three other men entered the bar. The quick eye of Meadows recognized them at once as three of what was known at that time as 'The Gallows Ring.' Every member of 'The Gallows Ring' had done time, but they still carried on a lucrative industry devoted to blackmail, intimidation, shop-lifting, and some of the clumsier recreations. Their leader, Ben Orming, had served seven years for bashing a Chinaman down at Rotherhithe.

'The Gallows Ring' was not popular in Wapping, for the reason

that many of their depredations had been inflicted upon their own class. When Meadows and Harry Jones took it into their heads to do a little wild prancing they took the trouble to go up into the West End. They considered 'The Gallows Ring' an ungentlemanly set; nevertheless, they always treated them with a certain external deference – an unpleasant crowd to quarrel with.

Ben Orming ordered beer for the three of them, and they leant against the bar and whispered in sullen accents. Something had evidently miscarried with the Ring. Mrs. Dawes continued to whine above the general drone of the bar. Suddenly she said:

'Ben, you're a hot old devil, you are. We was just 'aving a discussion like. Where was Wych Street?'

Ben scowled at her, and she continued:

'Some sez it was one place, some sez it was another. I *know* where it was, 'cors my aunt what died from blood p'ison, after eatin' tinned lobster, used to work at a corset shop . . .'

'Yus,' barked Ben, emphatically. 'I know where Wych Street was – it was just sarth of the river, afore yer come to Waterloo Station.'

It was then that the coloured man, who up to that point had taken no part in the discussion, thought fit to intervene.

'Nope. You's all wrong, cap'n. Wych Street were alongside de church, way over where de Strand takes a side line up west.'

Ben turned on him fiercely.

'What the blazes does a blanketty nigger know abaht it? I've told yer where Wych Street was.'

'Yus, and I know where it was,' interposed Meadows. 'Yer both wrong. Wych Street was a turning running from Long Acre into Wellington Street.'

'I didn't ask yer what *you* thought,' growled Ben.

'Well, I suppose I've a right to an opinion.'

'You always think you know everything, you do.'

'You can just keep yer mouth shut.'

'It 'ud take more'n you to shut it.'

Mr. Booth thought it advisable at this juncture to bawl across the bar:

'Now, gentlemen, no quarrelling – please.'

The affair might have subsided at that point, but for Mrs. Dawes. Her emotions over the death of the old lady in the street had been so stirred that she had been, almost unconsciously, drinking too much gin. She suddenly screamed out:

'Don't you take no lip from 'im, Mr. Medders. The dirty, thieving devil, 'e always thinks 'e's goin' to come it over everyone.'

She stood up threateningly, and one of Ben's supporters gave her a gentle push backward. In three minutes the bar was in a complete state of pandemonium. The three members of 'The Gallows Ring' fought two men and a woman, for Mr. Dawes merely stood in a corner and screamed out:

'Don't! Don't!'

Mrs. Dawes stabbed the man who had pushed her through the wrist with a hatpin. Meadows and Ben Orming closed on each other and fought savagely with the naked fists. A lucky blow early in the encounter sent Meadows reeling against the wall, with blood streaming down his temple. Then the coloured man hurled a pewter tankard straight at Ben and it hit him on the knuckles. The pain maddened him to a frenzy. His other supporter had immediately got to grips with Harry Jones, and picked up one of the high stools and, seizing an opportunity, brought it down crash on to the coloured man's skull.

The whole affair was a matter of minutes. Mr. Booth was bawling out in the street. A whistle sounded. People were running in all directions.

'Beat it! Beat it for God's sake!' called the man who had been stabbed through the wrist. His face was very white, and he was obviously about to faint.

Ben and the other man, whose name was Toller, dashed to the door. On the pavement there was a confused scramble. Blows were struck indiscriminately. Two policemen appeared. One was laid *hors de combat* by a kick on the knee-cap from Toller. The two men fled into the darkness, followed by a hue-and-cry. Born and bred in the locality, they took every advantage of their knowledge. They tacked through alleys and raced down dark mews, and clambered over walls. Fortunately for them, the people they passed, who might have tripped them up or aided in

the pursuit, merely fled indoors. The people in Wapping are not always on the side of the pursuer. But the police held on. At last Ben and Toller slipped through the door of a house in Aztec Street barely ten yards ahead of their nearest pursuer. Blows rained on the door, but they slipped the bolts, and then fell panting to the floor. When Ben could speak, he said:

'If they cop us, it means swinging.'

'Was the nigger done in?'

'I think so. But even if 'e wasn't, there was that other affair the night before last. The game's up.'

The ground floor rooms were shuttered and bolted, but they knew that the police would probably force the front door. At the back there was no escape, only a narrow stable yard, where lanterns were already flashing. The roof only extended thirty yards either way, and the police would probably take possession of it. They made a round of the house, which was sketchily furnished. There was a loaf, a small piece of mutton, and a bottle of pickles, and – the most precious possession – three bottles of whisky. Each man drank half a glass of neat whisky, then Ben said: 'We'll be able to keep 'em quiet for a bit, anyway,' and he went and fetched an old twelve-bore gun and a case of cartridges. Toller was opposed to this last desperate resort, but Ben continued to murmur, 'It means swinging, anyway. . . .'

And thus began the notorious siege of Aztec Street. It lasted three days and four nights. You may remember that, on forcing a panel of the front door Sub-Inspector Wraithe, of the V Division, was shot through the chest. The police then tried other methods. A hose was brought into play, without effect. Two policemen were killed and four wounded. The military was requisitioned. The street was picketed. Snipers occupied windows of the houses opposite. A distinguished member of the Cabinet drove down in a motor-car, and directed operations in a top-hat. It was the introduction of poison gas which was the ultimate cause of the downfall of the citadel. The body of Ben Orming was never found, but that of Toller was discovered near the front door with a bullet through his heart. The medical officer to the court pronounced that the man had been dead three days, but whether

killed by a chance bullet from a sniper or whether killed deliberately by his fellow-criminal was never revealed. For when the end came Orming had apparently planned a final act of venom. It was known that in the basement a considerable quantity of petrol had been stored. The contents had probably been carefully distributed over the most inflammable materials in the top rooms. The fire broke out, as one witness described it, 'almost like an explosion.' Orming must have perished in this. The roof blazed up, and the sparks carried across the yard and started a stack of light timber in the annexe of Messrs. Morrel's piano factory. The factory and two blocks of tenement buildings were burnt to the ground. The estimated cost of the destruction was one hundred and eighty thousand pounds. The casualties amounted to seven killed and fifteen wounded. . . .

At the inquiry held under Justice Pengammon, various odd, interesting facts were revealed. Mr. Lowes-Parlby, the brilliant young K.C., distinguished himself by his searching cross-examination of many witnesses. At one point a certain Mrs. Dawes was put in the box.

'Now,' said Mr. Lowes-Parlby, 'I understand that on the evening in question, Mrs. Dawes, you, and the victims, and these other people who have been mentioned, were all seated in the public bar of the "Wagtail," enjoying its no doubt excellent hospitality and indulging in a friendly discussion. Is that so?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Now, will you tell his lordship what you were discussing?'

'Diseases, sir.'

'Diseases! And did the argument become acrimonious?'

'Pardon?'

'Was there a serious dispute about diseases?'

'No, sir.'

'Well, what was the subject of the dispute?'

'We was arguin' as to where Wych Street was, sir.'

'What's that?' said his lordship.

'The witness states, my lord, that they were arguing as to where Wych Street was.'

'Wych Street? Do you mean W-Y-C-H?'

'Yes, sir.'

'You mean the narrow old street that used to run across the site of what is now the Gaiety Theatre?'

Mr. Lowes-Parlby smiled in his most charming manner.

'Yes, my lord, I believe the witness refers to the same street you mention, though, if I may be allowed to qualify your lordship's description of the locality, may I suggest that it was a little further east – at the side of the old Globe Theatre, which was adjacent to St. Martin's-in-the-Strand? That is the street you were all arguing about, isn't it, Mrs. Dawes?'

'Well, sir, my aunt, who died from eating tinned lobster, used to work at a corset shop. I ought to know.'

His lordship ignored the witness. He turned to the counsel rather peevishly:

'Mr. Lowes-Parlby, when I was your age I used to pass through Wych Street every day of my life. I did so for nearly twelve years. I think it hardly necessary for you to contradict me.'

The counsel bowed. It was not his place to dispute with a justice, although that justice be a hopeless old fool; but another eminent K.C., an elderly man with a tawny beard, rose in the body of the court, and said:

'If I may be allowed to interpose, your lordship, I also spent a great deal of my youth passing through Wych Street. I have gone into the matter, comparing past and present ordnance survey maps. If I am not mistaken, the street the witness was referring to began near the hoarding at the entrance to Kingsway and ended at the back of what is now the Aldwych Theatre.'

'Oh, no, Mr. Backer!' exclaimed Lowes-Parlby.

His lordship removed his glasses and snapped out:

'The matter is entirely irrelevant to the case.'

It certainly was, but the brief passage-of-arms left an unpleasant tang of bitterness behind. It was observed that Mr. Lowes-Parlby never again quite got the prehensile grip upon his cross-examination that he had shown in his treatment of the earlier witnesses. The coloured man, Harry Jones, had died in hospital, but Mr. Booth, the proprietor of the 'Wagtail,' Baldwin Meadows, Mr. Dawes and the man who was stabbed in the wrist, all gave

evidence of a rather nugatory character. Lowes-Parlby could do nothing with it. The findings of this special inquiry do not concern us. It is sufficient to say that the witnesses already mentioned all returned to Wapping. The man who had received the thrust of a hatpin through his wrist did not think it advisable to take any action against Mrs. Dawes. He was pleasantly relieved to find that he was only required as a witness of an abortive discussion.

★

In a few weeks' time the great Aztec Street siege remained only a romantic memory to the majority of Londoners. To Lowes-Parlby the little dispute with Justice Pengammon rankled unreasonably. It is annoying to be publicly snubbed for making a statement which you know to be absolutely true and which you have even taken pains to verify. And Lowes-Parlby was a young man accustomed to score. He made a point of looking everything up, of being prepared for an adversary thoroughly. He liked to give the appearance of knowing everything. The brilliant career just ahead of him at times dazzled him. He was one of the darlings of the gods. Everything came to Lowes-Parlby. His father had distinguished himself at the bar before him, and had amassed a modest fortune. He was an only son. At Oxford he had carried off every possible degree. He was already being spoken of for very high political honours. But the most sparkling jewel in the crown of his successes was Lady Adela Charters, the daughter of Lord Vermeer, the Minister for Foreign Affairs. She was his *fiancée*, and it was considered the most brilliant match of the season. She was young and almost pretty, and Lord Vermeer was immensely wealthy and one of the most influential men in Great Britain. Such a combination was irresistible. There seemed to be nothing missing in the life of Francis Lowes-Parlby, K.C.

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One of the most regular and absorbed spectators at the Aztec Street inquiry was old Stephen Garrit. Stephen Garrit held a unique but quite inconspicuous position in the legal world at that time. He was a friend of judges, a specialist at various abstruse

legal rulings, a man of remarkable memory, and yet – an amateur. He had never taken silk, never eaten the requisite dinners, never passed an examination in his life; but the law of evidence was meat and drink to him. He passed his life in the Temple, where he had chambers. Some of the most eminent counsel in the world would take his opinion, or come to him for advice. He was very old, very silent, and very absorbed. He attended every meeting of the Aztec Street inquiry, but from beginning to end he never volunteered an opinion.

After the inquiry was over, he went and visited an old friend at the London Survey Office. He spent two mornings examining maps. After that he spent two mornings pottering about the Strand, Kingsway and Aldwych; then he worked out some careful calculations on a ruled chart. He entered the particulars in a little book which he kept for purposes of that kind, and then retired to his chambers to study other matters. But before doing so, he entered a little apophthegm in another book. It was apparently a book in which he intended to compile a summary of his legal experiences. The sentence ran:

'The basic trouble is that people make statements without sufficient data.'

Old Stephen need not have appeared in this story at all, except for the fact that he was present at the dinner at Lord Vermeer's, where a rather deplorable incident occurred. And you must acknowledge that in the circumstances it is useful to have such a valuable and efficient witness.

Lord Vermeer was a competent, forceful man, a little quick-tempered and autocratic. He came from Lancashire, and before entering politics had made an enormous fortune out of borax, artificial manure, and starch.

It was a small dinner party, with a motive behind it. His principal guest was Mr. Sandeman, the London agent of the Ameer of Bakkan. Lord Vermeer was very anxious to impress Mr. Sandeman and to be very friendly with him: the reasons will appear later. Mr. Sandeman was a self-confessed cosmopolitan. He spoke seven languages and professed to be equally at home in any capital in Europe. London had been his headquarters for

over twenty years. Lord Vermeer also invited Mr. Arthur Toombs, a colleague in the Cabinet, his prospective son-in-law, Lowes-Parlby, K.C., James Trolley, a very tame Socialist M.P., and Sir Henry and Lady Breyd, the two latter being invited, not because Sir Henry was of any use, but because Lady Breyd was a pretty and brilliant woman who might amuse his principal guest. The sixth guest was Stephen Garrit.

The dinner was a great success. When the succession of courses eventually came to a stop, and the ladies had retired, Lord Vermeer conducted his male guests into another room for a ten minutes' smoke before rejoining them. It was then that the unfortunate incident occurred. There was no love lost between Lowes-Parlby and Mr. Sandeman. It is difficult to ascribe the real reason of their mutual animosity, but on the several occasions when they had met there had invariably passed a certain sardonic by-play. They were both clever, both comparatively young, each a little suspect and jealous of the other; moreover, it was said in some quarters that Mr. Sandeman had had intentions himself with regard to Lord Vermeer's daughter, that he had been on the point of a proposal when Lowes-Parlby had butted in and forestalled him.

Mr. Sandeman had dined well, and he was in the mood to dazzle with a display of his varied knowledge and experiences. The conversation drifted from a discussion of the rival claims of great cities to the slow, inevitable removal of old landmarks. There had been a slightly acrimonious disagreement between Lowes-Parlby and Mr. Sandeman as to the claims of Budapest and Lisbon, and Mr. Sandeman had scored because he extracted from his rival a confession that, though he had spent two months in Budapest, he had only spent two days in Lisbon. Mr. Sandeman had lived for four years in either city. Lowes-Parlby changed the subject abruptly.

'Talking of landmarks,' he said, 'we had a queer point arise in that Aztec Street inquiry. The original dispute arose owing to a discussion between a crowd of people in a pub as to where Wych Street was.'

'I remember,' said Lord Vermeer. 'A perfectly absurd dis-

cussion. Why, I should have thought that any man over forty would remember exactly where it was.'

'Where would you say it was, sir?' asked Lowes-Parlby.

'Why, to be sure, it ran from the corner of Chancery Lane and ended at the second turning after the Law Courts, going west.'

Lowes-Parlby was about to reply, when Mr. Sandeman cleared his throat and said, in his supercilious, oily voice:

'Excuse me, my lord. I know my Paris, and Vienna, and Lisbon, every brick and stone, but I look upon London as my home. I know my London even better. I have a perfectly clear recollection of Wych Street. When I was a student I used to visit there to buy books. It ran parallel to New Oxford Street on the south side, just between it and Lincoln's Inn Fields.'

There was something about this assertion that infuriated Lowes-Parlby. In the first place, it was so hopelessly wrong and so insufferably asserted. In the second place, he was already smarting under the indignity of being shown up about Lisbon. And then there suddenly flashed through his mind the wretched incident when he had been publicly snubbed by Justice Pengammon about the very same point; and he knew that he was right each time. Damn Wych Street! He turned on Mr. Sandeman.

'Oh, nonsense! You may know something about these – eastern cities; you certainly know nothing about London if you make a statement like that. Wych Street was a little further east of what is now the Gaiety Theatre. It used to run by the side of the old Globe Theatre, parallel to the Strand.'

The dark moustache of Mr. Sandeman shot upward, revealing a narrow line of yellow teeth. He uttered a sound that was a mingling of contempt and derision; then he drawled out:

'Really? How wonderful – to have such comprehensive knowledge!'

He laughed, and his small eyes fixed his rival. Lowes-Parlby flushed a deep red. He gulped down half a glass of port and muttered just above a whisper: 'Damned impudence!' Then, in the rudest manner he could display, he turned his back deliberately on Sandeman and walked out of the room.

★

In the company of Adela he tried to forget the little contretemps. The whole thing was so absurd – so utterly undignified. As though *he* didn't know! It was the little accumulation of pinpricks all arising out of that one argument. The result had suddenly goaded him to – well, being rude, to say the least of it. It wasn't that Sandeman mattered. To the devil with Sandeman! But what would his future father-in-law think? He had never before given way to any show of ill-temper before him. He forced himself into a mood of rather fatuous jocularity. Adela was at her best in those moods. They would have lots of fun together in the days to come. Her almost pretty, not too clever, face was dimpled with kittenish glee. Life was a tremendous rag to her. They were expecting Toccata, the famous opera-singer. She had been engaged at a very high fee to come on from Covent Garden. Mr. Sandeman was very fond of music.

Adela was laughing and discussing which was the most honourable position for the great Sandeman to occupy. There came to Lowes-Parlby a sudden abrupt misgiving. What sort of wife would this be to him when they were not just fooling? He immediately dismissed the curious, furtive little stab of doubt. The splendid proportions of the room calmed his senses. A huge bowl of dark red roses quickened his perceptions. His career . . . The door opened. But it was not La Toccata. It was one of the household flunkeys. Lowes-Parlby turned again to his inamorata.

'Excuse me, sir. His lordship says will you kindly go and see him in the library?'

Lowes-Parlby regarded the messenger, and his heart beat quickly. An uncontrollable presage of evil racked his nerve centres. Something had gone wrong; and yet the whole thing was so absurd, trivial. In a crisis – well, he could always apologize. He smiled confidently at Adela, and said:

'Why, of course; with pleasure. Please excuse me, dear.'

He followed the impressive servant out of the room. His foot had barely touched the carpet of the library when he realized that his worst apprehensions were to be plumbed to the depths. For a moment he thought Lord Vermeer was alone, then he observed old Stephen Garrit, lying in an easy-chair in the corner like a

piece of crumpled parchment. Lord Vermeer did not beat about the bush. When the door was closed, he bawled out, savagely:

'What the devil have you done?'

'Excuse me, sir. I'm afraid I don't understand. Is it Sandeman . . .?'

'Sandeman has gone.'

'Oh, I'm sorry.'

'Sorry! By God, I should think you might be sorry! You insulted him. My prospective son-in-law insulted him in my own house!'

'I'm awfully sorry. I didn't realize . . .'

'Realize! Sit down, and don't assume for one moment that you continue to be my prospective son-in-law. Your insult was a most intolerable piece of effrontery, not only to him, but to me.'

'But I . . .'

'Listen to me. Do you know that the government were on the verge of concluding a most far-reaching treaty with that man? Do you know that the position was just touch-and-go? The concessions we were prepared to make would have cost the State thirty million pounds, and it would have been cheap. Do you hear that? It would have been cheap! Bakkan is one of the most vulnerable outposts of the Empire. It is a terrible danger zone. If certain powers can usurp our authority – and, mark you, the whole blamed place is already riddled with this new pernicious doctrine – you know what I mean – before we know where we are the whole East will be in a blaze. India! My God! This contract we were negotiating would have countered this outward thrust. And you, you blockhead, you come here and insult the man upon whose word the whole thing depends.'

'I really can't see, sir, how I should know all this.'

'You can't see it! But, you fool, you seemed to go out of your way. You insulted him about the merest quibble – in my house!'

'He said he knew where Wych Street was. He was quite wrong. I corrected him.'

'Wych Street! Wych Street be damned! If he said Wych Street was in the moon, you should have agreed with him. There was

no call to act in the way you did. And you – you think of going into politics!'

The somewhat cynical inference of this remark went unnoticed. Lowes-Parlby was too unnerved. He mumbled:

'I'm very sorry.'

'I don't want your sorrow. I want something more practical.'

'What's that, sir?'

'You will drive straight to Mr. Sandeman's, find him, and apologize. Tell him you find that he was right about Wych Street after all. If you can't find him to-night, you must find him to-morrow morning. I give you till midday to-morrow. If by that time you have not offered a handsome apology to Mr. Sandeman, you do not enter this house again, you do not see my daughter again. Moreover, all the power I possess will be devoted to hounding you out of that profession you have dishonoured. Now you can go.'

Dazed and shaken, Lowes-Parlby drove back to his flat at Knightsbridge. Before acting he must have time to think. Lord Vermeer had given him till to-morrow midday. Any apologizing that was done should be done after a night's reflection. The fundamental purposes of his being were to be tested. He knew that. He was at a great crossing. Some deep instinct within him was grossly outraged. Is it that a point comes when success demands that a man shall sell his soul? It was all so absurdly trivial – a mere argument about the position of a street that had ceased to exist. As Lord Vermeer said, what did it matter about Wych Street?

Of course he should apologize. It would hurt horribly to do so, but would a man sacrifice everything on account of some footling argument about a street?

In his own rooms, Lowes-Parlby put on a dressing-gown, and, lighting a pipe, he sat before the fire. He would have given anything for companionship at such a moment – the right companionship. How lovely it would be to have – a woman, just the right woman, to talk this all over with; some one who understood and sympathized. A sudden vision came to him of Adela's face grinning about the prospective visit of La Toccata, and again the

low voice of misgiving whispered in his ears. Would Adela be – just the right woman? In very truth, did he really love Adela? Or was it all – a rag? Was life a rag – a game played by lawyers, politicians, and people?

The fire burned low, but still he continued to sit thinking, his mind principally occupied with the dazzling visions of the future. It was past midnight when he suddenly muttered a low 'Damn!' and walked to the bureau. He took up a pen and wrote:

'DEAR MR. SANDEMAN, – I must apologize for acting so rudely to you last night. It was quite unpardonable of me, especially as I since find, on going into the matter, that you were quite right about the position of Wych Street. I can't think how I made the mistake. Please forgive me.

'Yours cordially,

'FRANCIS LOWES-PARLBY'

Having written this, he sighed and went to bed. One might have imagined at that point that the matter was finished. But there are certain little greedy demons of conscience that require a lot of stilling, and they kept Lowes-Parlby awake more than half the night. He kept on repeating to himself, 'It's all positively absurd!' But the little greedy demons pranced around the bed, and they began to group things into two definite issues. On the one side, the great appearances; on the other, something at the back of it all, something deep, fundamental, something that could only be expressed by one word – truth. If he had *really* loved Adela – if he weren't so absolutely certain that Sandeman was wrong and he was right – why should he have to say that Wych Street was where it wasn't?

'Isn't there, after all,' said one of the little demons, 'something which makes for greater happiness than success? Confess this, and we'll let you sleep.'

Perhaps that is one of the most potent weapons the little demons possess. However full our lives may be, we ever long for moments of tranquillity. And conscience holds before our eyes the mirror of an ultimate tranquillity. Lowes-Parlby was certainly not himself. The gay, debonair, and brilliant egoist was tortured, and

tortured almost beyond control; and it had all apparently arisen through the ridiculous discussion about a street. At a quarter past three in the morning he arose from his bed with a groan, and, going into the other room, he tore the letter to Mr. Sandeman to pieces.

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Three weeks later old Stephen Garrit was lunching with the Lord Chief Justice. They were old friends, and they never found it incumbent to be very conversational. The lunch was an excellent, but frugal, meal. They both ate slowly and thoughtfully, and their drink was water. It was not till they reached the dessert stage that his lordship indulged in any very informative comment, and then he recounted to Stephen the details of a recent case in which he considered that the presiding judge had, by an unprecedented paralogy, misinterpreted the Law of Evidence. Stephen listened with absorbed attention. He took two cob-nuts from the silver dish, and turned them over meditatively, without cracking them. When his lordship had completely stated his opinion and peeled a pear, Stephen mumbled:

'I have been impressed, very impressed indeed. Even in my own field of – limited observation – the opinion of an outsider, you may say – so often it happens – the trouble caused by an affirmation without sufficiently established data. I have seen lives lost, ruin brought about, endless suffering. Only last week, a young man – a brilliant career – almost shattered. People make statements without –'

He put the nuts back on the dish and then, in an apparently irrelevant manner, he said abruptly:

'Do you remember Wych Street, my lord?'

The Lord Chief Justice grunted.

'Wych Street! Of course I do.'

'Where would you say it was, my lord?'

'Why, here, of course.'

His lordship took a pencil from his pocket and sketched a plan on the tablecloth.

'It used to run from there to here.'

Stephen adjusted his glasses and carefully examined the plan. He took a long time to do this, and when he had finished his hand instinctively went toward a breast pocket where he kept a notebook with little squared pages. Then he stopped and sighed. After all, why argue with the law? The law was like that – an excellent thing, not infallible, of course (even the plan of the Lord Chief Justice was a quarter of a mile out), but still an excellent, a wonderful thing. He examined the bony knuckles of his hands and yawned slightly.

'Do you remember it?' said the Lord Chief Justice.

Stephen nodded sagely, and his voice seemed to come from a long way off:

'Yes, I remember it, my lord. It was a melancholy little street.'

Red Hair

BY ELIZABETH BIBESCO

To *Augustus John*

Of course she was very far from being the only person to be irritated by them. Only they struck her at a peculiar angle; she couldn't escape from them. They were, so to speak, a life sentence. And bumping your wings only made the feathers come out. She had been, she reflected, so very feathery once. Besides, when, as she put it to herself, she tried to keep her own end up, they would put their fingers in their ears mentally, just as if she were a noise. They always behaved as if the language of their thoughts were Russian to her (which it was), and when they talked to her they instinctively translated what they had to say into words which they would never have used with one another. So whenever she was with them she spent her time between being bewildered and being humiliated. What if they were clever? Cleverness isn't everything.

One day she overheard her mother-in-law saying: 'It's not so much that poor Linda isn't very intelligent – lots of unintelligent people are so understanding – but it's such a pity that she can't be a little more acquiescent. She was so much sweeter before she married.'

'That is our fault,' her daughter had retorted.

It was so characteristic of them, Linda thought furiously, even to see that. And why poor? Because she was not like them, or because she was not liked by them? And how dared they assume that either constituted a cause for pity?

'I don't know why she should be so on the defensive,' Susan had continued. 'We welcomed her with open arms.'

'And open minds,' Lady Tarleton added, 'only I suppose that our arms have never quite closed round her, and that she wants a niche in our minds. We haven't given her that either, have we?'

'Perhaps not,' her daughter agreed; and then, with that resolute

[1] From *The Whole Story*, by Elizabeth Bibesco, by permission of Messrs. Hutchinson & Co. (Publishers), Ltd.

attempt to do her justice which Linda found most unbearable of all: 'She has such lovely hair – a real burning bush.'

Linda's hair was beautiful. It flamed riotously all over her head. But for it her face would have been entirely commonplace – a little mouth, too little; a nose like two nostrils in an inexperienced full-face drawing (you felt that it could not exist at all in profile); pale blue eyes with rather pale eyelashes; and a pretty white skin always on the brink of freckles. But nothing emphatic; nothing to arrest your attention except her hair.

It was her hair which might make people think her romantic if they didn't think.

It was her hair which had first made Dick's eyes wander towards her, and had subsequently made him follow them until its glowing mass became entangled in his thoughts and his dreams, and out of its glinting fabric a web was woven from which he could not escape.

At dinner at Tarleton, with a hundred ideas like coloured balls in the air together, and everyone (so it seemed to Linda) talking at the same time, and yet managing to hear what everyone else said – sometimes, she couldn't imagine why, a silence would follow one of her own remarks – Dick's eyes, lit by the intellectual battle that he loved, would soften a little as he saw the light itself nestling in the red-gold softness of his wife's head, and his thoughts would wander – was it to her or to his image of her?

Linda enjoyed talking about books. Like all people who don't read much, she was always tremendously impressed by the last thing that she had read, urging it upon everyone else. Each book to her was a wild creature which she had tamed, strange and remote as a desert island, discovered by her resource and courage. Not, of course, that she had not been brought up in cultivated circles. She had once known a great friend of W. L. George's. But when she brought this cat out of her bag as if it had been a beautiful purring Persian full of slow pride, Lady Tarleton, looking past her with short-sighted, friendly eyes, had murmured absent-mindedly: 'W. L. George, dear? Who is W. L. George?'

And Linda, instead of feeling elated, proud to be able to confound such gross ignorance, had, on the contrary, felt small and

crushed, as if, by some absurd loaded dice of providence, only the things that her mother-in-law knew about had importance.

Lady Tarleton's effortless pre-eminence was a continual source of surprise to Linda. Haphazard in her methods, short-sighted, with friendly, absent-minded manners, how had she managed to be an influence, a comfort and an inspiration to so many different and divergent people?

Susan appeared far more positive. Penetrating and clear, with a certain hard fineness, mastering with difficulty the impatience of her fastidiousness, but softening all the same under her mother's gentle chidings. 'After all, darling, pretences are so consoling.'

'Pretendings,' Susan amended with a smile. 'You are so much nicer than I am, Mama.'

Lord Tarleton was very gentle and remote and aloof. Linda would twine herself into his arms – half creeper, half cat – and he would say: 'There, there,' patting her nervously from the depths of his embarrassment.

'I never know what she is thinking about,' he would explain to his wife, who would answer gently: 'She is just purring at you. It is rather nice, don't you think?'

'Well, you may be right, my dear,' he would agree vaguely. He found his daughter-in-law very disconcerting.

'They are all very good at their books,' Linda would explain to her family – and the phrase clearly conveyed a perfectly definite meaning to them.

'What can she and Dick talk about when they are alone?' Susan asked her mother desperately.

'Perhaps they don't exactly talk, dear."

'But Dick! Think of Dick!'

His mother thought of him. 'There is always her hair,' she murmured vaguely.

'Well, he can't stay entangled in that for ever.'

'Perhaps not. But we mustn't – whatever we do we mustn't try to unwind him.'

'Dick of all people' – Susan was bitter – 'with his uncompromising sensitiveness.'

'Don't you think,' her mother protested gently, 'that we are a little inclined to want everything paid in our own currency?'

'Dick's currency.'

'Perhaps, in a sort of unconscious way, he wanted to escape from it.'

Susan met this without flinching. Then they heard Linda's high, tinkling laugh and her high, shallow voice saying, 'I find it so difficult not to see both sides of a question.'

Her companion's answer was inaudible, but the breeze brought them a giggle from Linda.

Susan raised her eyebrows. 'Paper money,' she said. 'Tissue paper money.'

★

Semi-unconsciously Linda tried to keep Dick away from his family as much as possible. She didn't enjoy being at Tarleton. There were always people sitting about talking, talking, talking. 'I don't see why they think themselves so clever,' she would say sarcastically. 'Anyone can talk.'

But all the same these eternal conversational orgies mystified her. One could discuss people and clothes and books and plays, but when one had explained that something was 'perfectly rotten' or 'perfectly lovely' there was really nothing more to be said; whereas the Tarletons and their friends went on and on and on, until everything got so buried in words that one really didn't know what one was talking about.

And their standards were so queer. Dick, who never looked at another woman, talked so oddly about marriage, and when she laughed a little coyly to show that she knew that it was nonsense, no one said, as her father certainly would have done: 'What does little Mrs. Home Ruler think?' And when she had commented brightly, 'We women know all about you men,' there had been a startled silence, interrupted by a young man in spectacles asking, 'What exactly do you mean by all?' To which she had not unnaturally answered: 'Ask the cat.'

At that moment Lord Tarleton had come in and said, 'Cats? What cats are you talking about?' And there had been an awkward

pause, breathlessly curtailed by Susan's saying, 'I love the little short-haired grey ones. They have so much more outline than Persians.' And the young man had looked at her with loving eyes, and murmured, 'Yes, you would – you, who love trees in winter, shorn of obliterating leaves.'

They were wrong-headed, Linda reflected. That was what it was. Trees were meant to have leaves. And what did they mean by obliterating? They always seemed to get their words wrong. It was so confusing. 'Marriage is such a silly form of hate,' Susan had said earlier in the day, and nobody had corrected her. No doubt it was talking so much that was at the bottom of all the mischief.

Linda often longed to ask Dick about his family. There were, she felt, a large number of things that he could explain to her. But he always looked so puzzled when she asked him questions.

On the night of the cat conversation Susan was sitting in her mother's bedroom.

'And marriage is called a sacrament,' she said bitterly.

For a moment Lady Tarleton's short-sighted eyes looked over the wall that sacrament had been to her into distant spaces of unknown, vivid realizations.

'I think perhaps it is,' she dissented gently – almost apologetically.

'And one has to be strangled for life by a few red hairs?'

Lady Tarleton smiled.

'We all have our red hairs, don't we? At least I do hope we have.'

'But not nothing else – absolutely nothing else.'

'No one could be more positive than Linda. As she says herself, she always knows her own mind.'

'Yes' – Susan was still bitter – ' "when once I make up my mind, I make up my mind" – as if there were the smallest hope of ever untying it.'

'I think, darling' – her mother's voice was very soft – 'you would be happier if you never thought of the word "mind" in connection with Linda. Just face the fact once and for all that she hasn't got one.'

'There are so many years to come. What will Dick do?' Susan moaned.

Dick tried to be impartial, or, rather, equally partial to both sides. Thinking of his wife, he would feel her curling herself into his arms like a little warm, fluttering bird with a frightened, beating heart, subsiding gently into confidence; or he would see her touzled scarlet head spreading over the pillow and her half-awake, wholly surprised eyes beginning anew each morning to get accustomed to the world. And when she murmured: 'What did Mr. Dyke mean by "obliterating leaves?" ' he would laugh and kiss her, and burn his fingers in her hair.

As for his family – well, they didn't need protection. Love – how much he loved them; admiration – how much he admired them; confidence, in the sense in which it meant trusting rather than confiding – all of these things he felt. But defending them would be like defending an army against a humming bird – an operation which could only be necessary if the army knew the meaning of a humming bird.

In dealing with the relations of his wife and his family, Dick instinctively sought refuge in metaphors. Insidiously they would lead him astray, until he drifted away with them out of reach of reality.

Dick was rather like his father.

★

'And it never gets any darker.' Lady Tarleton's short-sighted eyes were almost touching Linda's hair as it swirled about over her pillow.

'No; it has always been the same,' Linda said.

Susan was getting a little tired of the zest with which Mr. Dyke believed in free will. It contrived to make her so very responsible for herself – not on broad, generous lines of theories and achievements and personality, but in the most exasperating precision and detail. The fact that Mr. Dyke, who was in love with her, thought her habit of biting her nails, and all of the other tricks with which she had for years carried on a sort of trench warfare, divine exhalations of her perfection was not really very consoling.

It was more restful to assume that her great height (which she hated) had been foisted on to her by God, and that when she was irritable it was because she was tired. But Mr. Dyke could admit none of these compromises between deities. Her tallness was the shooting up of her soul; her irritability, sparks from the fire of her intellect. All of which was very fatiguing to Susan, who was, in addition, annoyed with Mr. Dyke for being called Demetrius – an annoyance which she admitted would have been more justified by his philosophy than it was by hers.

The topic was being discussed after dinner.

'After all,' Dick said, 'if you tell a woman she is beautiful, you give it and she accepts it as a compliment to herself rather than to God.'

'And, pray, when did you last tell a woman she was beautiful?' asked Linda roguishly.

Susan ignored her.

'I suppose one does stamp one's own looks – trade mark them, so to speak,' she agreed. 'But admitting that you pour expression into your eyes, what about their shape? Surely you can't be asked to accept responsibility for a poached egg when you wanted an almond?'

'Your own poached egg' – Mr. Dyke spoke with gravity – 'is better than anyone else's almond.'

'Clearly.' Susan was very dry. 'But not better than one's own almond would have been.'

'One man's almond is another man's poached egg,' said Dick flippantly; but Mr. Dyke was not to be put off so easily.

'It is immaterial whether it is a poached egg or an almond,' he explained almost reproachfully 'The point is that it is your own.'

'There is a time for everything,' Linda said. 'No one wants a poached egg for dinner or an almond at breakfast.'

Dick laughed. Mr. Dyke looked at Linda, opened his mouth, and then shut it again.

Susan said under her breath, 'What on earth does she imagine we're talking about?' and then reproached herself for her odious habit – of which she was always guiltily conscious – of saying things under her breath hoping that they would be heard.

'I think,' Lady Tarleton said gently, 'that in a way people achieve their own looks. Not the outlines, perhaps, but the filling in. A way of walking, a way of moving your head, certain laughs, certain gestures, so that it is not really your height that counts, but your carriage; not your mouth that matters, but the way you smile.'

'Clearly,' approved Mr. Dyke, 'clearly.' And he cast a surreptitious glance at Linda with the secretly satisfied feeling that to her it would probably be anything but clear.

But Susan was out of temper. 'I shan't feel responsible for the colour of my hair till I dye it,' she said. 'Will you, Linda?'

There was a horrified pause, as everyone, except Dick, believed that Linda's hair was the only thing for which she could conceivably feel proud of being responsible.

'I should never dye my hair,' the victim explained, 'any more than I would curl it if it weren't naturally curly. As Mother says, nature knows her own business best.'

Lady Tarleton said gently, 'She certainly did in your case, my dear.'

'I can't see why one shouldn't receive credit for transforming a mouse into a raven or a fox.' Susan, who was cross, couldn't get her teeth out of the subject.

'I shouldn't have thought you went in much for changing yourself,' Dick retorted quietly.

Susan flushed.

'In your sister, change would be disloyalty,' flashed Mr. Dyke.

'I always longed to have red hair,' Lady Tarleton smiled at them all. 'I wanted it so badly that I used to look through my whole hair-coloured crop for one symptom.'

'Think,' Susan laughed, 'if you had plunged quite young, and achieved your own head.'

'One achieves so many failures as it is,' observed her mother a little grimly.

Dick and Linda walked out on to the terrace.

'Your family are always achieving things,' she said plaintively.

He was silent.

'Would you like me to achieve?' she asked, curling in to him.

'The important thing is to be,' he said gently.

The moon caught her. Her head was lifted up to him like a thirsty flower.

'I love you,' he said, kissing her passionately.

As she entered the drawing-room she began smoothing her hair.

★

'Father's made a riddle,' Linda, who was reading her letters, informed an unexpectant breakfast-table. 'Why are two men no match for one woman?'

Susan, who was feeling guilty, tried to look puzzled.

'Because no woman can make a match with more than one man.'

'How clever,' Lady Tarleton said. 'I have never guessed a riddle in my life. It would be so nice to be able to just once before I died.'

'And he wrote it himself,' Linda explained triumphantly.

'Father's so funny,' she added. 'Why, sometimes I feel I must go home just to have a good laugh.'

'How nice,' murmured Lady Tarleton, a little wanly.

'Of course there's a funny side to everything,' Linda continued brightly, 'but Father's a rare one for seeing it. I don't know what he'd do here,' she added candidly, 'though of course it's not everyone likes a joke.'

Demetrius felt very strongly that she ought to be told – what exactly, he didn't know. Nevertheless, when breakfast was over he asked her to show him the kitchen garden. Linda was delighted. She arched her neck at him, smiled through half-shut eyes, allowed the smoke to come through her lips in slow, blue coils – in fact, she treated him just as if he were one of her own 'young men.'

'I do like a woman to be womanly, don't you?' she asked sweetly, unconscious that to Mr. Dyke a woman was invariably either a goddess or a female.

'What exactly do you mean by womanly?' Demetrius was always anxious to be sure that other people knew what they meant.

'Feminine,' Linda explained. 'Mother always says that men

should be men and women women. Of course, not everyone can have a way with them, but that's no reason for behaving like a man.'

Mr. Dyke was bewildered. Linda had never known him so silent.

'Susan's not like other girls,' she went on.

'Your sister-in-law is not a girl,' Demetrius interrupted. 'She is a woman.'

It sounded rather lame.

'Quite,' Linda agreed, 'she's never been young. That's what it is. Of course, it keeps men off, her being so like a man herself.'

Mr. Dyke stared. He was speechless.

'Not that I don't think she'd change if Mr. All Right came along,' his companion added magnanimously.

'How dare you talk about her?' Mr. Dyke shouted. 'How dare you, you shallow, empty-headed – you – you thing! God hasn't given you eyes you could see her with.' Demetrius was spluttering with hate.

Linda shrank back. Then she said in a low voice: 'Shallow – empty-headed. That's what they think me, isn't it?'

Then she burst into tears. 'I didn't want to come here. I never asked to live among clever people.'

Mr. Dyke was horribly embarrassed. He didn't know what to do.

'Please, Mrs. Tarleton, please don't cry. I didn't mean it – really I didn't. I lost my temper. You see I – I – love Susan, and I couldn't bear the way you spoke of her. You do see, don't you?' Demetrius pleading, became suddenly human.

Linda, who dearly liked a love affair, dried her eyes and dabbed a little powder on her face.

'That's all right,' she said. 'I'm a bit hasty myself.' And then: 'All's fair in love and war.'

Mr. Dyke felt abashed. She had, after all, been very generous.

★

That night Linda thought – or, rather, the words 'shallow, empty-headed' went round and round in her head.

Yes, that was what they thought about her. She had always been an alien to them – somebody else's pet – a nasty little yapping dog – the sort they never would have dreamt of having themselves. Of course they patted her. It was the easiest thing to do. And then Linda thought of herself – tenderly and a little romantically.

She had been sweet and gentle and pretty, soft and alluring and womanly. Intelligent – yes; but not intellectual. What was the point of an intellectual woman? Intuition, reflected Linda with satisfaction; that was what she had got. Women arrived by instinct at the point which men reached – more slowly – by reason. The eternal feminine, ever since she had first heard of it, had always dominated her conception of life. The functions of the two sexes were quite distinct and different. Charming women weren't meant to bother their pretty heads. Man, by plodding logic, dominated the material world, while woman attracted and distracted, keeping hidden away her primæval wisdom.

Femininity. Linda knew just the blend of the sentimental, the platitudinous and the coy, out of which it was made. In her world women turned men round their little fingers; the 'male' was managed without his knowing it. It was a matter of being dainty and pouting, of having 'pretty ways,' and not showing how clever you were. And as an outlet there was always a giggling freemasonry of female friends.

But after her marriage somehow or other her values wouldn't fit into her new life. Dick never complained of the food, never grumbled about the money she spent, never objected to her gentleman friends – in fact, from the point of view of being 'managed' he could hardly be said to exist. When she had told him that Bertie had kissed her in a taxi, he had said, 'Poor Bertie,' which had seemed to her an altogether absurd thing to say, though not quite so absurd as Susan's 'Surely not as bad as that,' when Linda told her that Bertie was 'quite the gentleman.'

The Tarletons really were as queer as they could be. 'Quaint,' she called them to her family, because one must be loyal. You couldn't talk anything over with Susan. She really didn't seem to know what you meant.

'I always think that we women should stick together,' Linda had explained to her. 'I tell my young men straight out: "Don't you believe that women can't be friends. It may suit your book to think so, but it's not true." '

Susan had agreed rather vaguely, while Linda continued: 'I always say, "Now, don't you play the Lords of Creation. We women can do quite well without you," ' and Susan had answered. 'I have never seen a woman who could. I can't myself.'

Linda had been quite horrified. 'Nice' women didn't talk like that. What would her mother have said?

The relations between the Harrises and the Tarletons had always been a little strained. Mr. Harris had said to Lord Tarleton: 'Well, the young people may regard us as old fogies, but we're not too old to remember kissing-time.'

And Mrs. Harris had said to Dick: 'Whip her when she's naughty and kiss her when she's good. That's the language a woman understands.'

But it had clearly not been a language that Dick understood.

Mrs. Harris had always been very anxious to explain to Lady Tarleton what a lot of chances Linda had had, her stories ending triumphantly with phrases like: 'And we all know how difficult it is to make a naval man take "no" for an answer.' But Lady Tarleton had evidently not known.

They were an odd family, Linda reflected; ignorant, with all their book-learning. What irritated her most of all about them was their calm way of not seeing things. There was nothing they couldn't overlook if they wanted to. She herself would frequently explain to her mother, 'I just ignored him.' But it always meant a toss of the head, a deliberately-turned back, an ostentatiously-hummed tune. Lady Tarleton, on the other hand, simply didn't seem to notice. She would look at you with smiling, friendly eyes, and what you had said or done was irretrievably lost, dissolving altogether in her non-recognition. Susan was much less masterly than her mother. If you had annoyed her she would look through you, not at you; and her snub would set you on your feet again.

'You can always make things vanish,' Linda had heard her say

to Lady Tarleton, 'with your unseeing and all-seeing eye, reducing irrelevant, disagreeable things to their proper unimportance. I endow them with my indignation, and, of course, it gives them a new lease of life.'

That mother and daughter adored one another, Linda could not deny. And yet how odd they were together – always generalizing. Lady Tarleton never seemed to take a proper mother's interest at all. She asked no questions, laid down no rules, invited no confidences. And yet what was it that Mr. Dyke had said? That their whole relationship was irrigated by understanding. Linda remembered wondering if he meant 'irritated,' but of course that wouldn't have made sense either.

Poor Demetrius! To think that he was in love with Susan! It seemed so odd. Susan, who was so tall and erect and firm, so pitiably without what Mrs. Harris called the '*je ne sais quois*.'

It really was odd, Linda thought, but she brightened a little when she remembered that there was, after all, no accounting for tastes.

'Mr. Dyke wants to marry Susan,' she told Dick, a little triumphant at being able to impart such exciting information.

'Poor Demetrius; she will never marry him.' Dick didn't seem at all surprised by her news. 'People are always wanting to marry Susan.'

Linda was wide-eyed with amazement.

'Do you mean to say that she's had several proposals?'

Dick laughed. 'Dozens. But she's so uncompromising. She says that every marriage represents a certain lapse of fastidiousness. Of course I see what she means — '

'I don't,' snapped Linda, and she left the room.

'My precious!' Catching up with her in the passage, Dick caught her in his arms.

He still loved the things she didn't see.

Linda felt that her knowledge of Mr. Dyke's secret created a bond between them. She would sit down next to him and have a little talk.

'I do like books,' she would say. 'I've always said to Father,

"There's a great art in writing." He would tease me so when I was little, and say: "What sort of a stocking are we knitting today? Blue, I'll be bound." '

Mr. Dyke never knew what to answer.

'Your father must be a very exceptional man,' he would murmur truthfully.

'I do wish you knew him.' Linda was eager. 'He's so original. He says that a man who's made a good joke has done a good deed. He told Mr. Norris – that's our clergyman – so. "Healthy laughter," he said, "wholesome laughter, is a benefit to mankind." '

'And what did Mr. Norris say?'

'He quite agreed. He says you please God if you play heartily and work heartily.'

Demetrius was a little disappointed by Mr. Norris, who clearly didn't come up to the Harris standard.

Susan said to him later in the day, 'Do you think it is quite honourable to draw poor Linda out?'

'Mrs. Tarleton is a nice woman,' he answered unexpectedly. 'And without her red hair she would probably have been a happy one.'

'She is happy,' murmured Lady Tarleton; and then, gently rebuking Susan, 'So is Dick.'

'It isn't being in love; it's loving that makes you happy,' Susan said passionately. 'It's like the difference between beauty and charm. What is left when your beauty has gone, when the tide is out, and all the hidden boots and sardine tins are revealed? Charm is high tide for ever.'

'Some tides go out and leave star-fish and little pink shells and the sunset reflected in wet sand.'

'It's safest all covered up,' Susan said harshly.

Linda became more and more conscious of the way her in-laws harped on her hair. 'One would think it was my only feature,' she would say resentfully, and indeed it did sometimes seem as if it were the only cushion on which the whole family could fall back with relief.

Susan had refused Demetrius, who had returned to London;

but there had been no talk about it. Linda wanted to know from Lady Tarleton exactly what he had said.

'I don't know, dear; I didn't ask.'

It was most unnatural, Linda thought, and as she was feeling cross, she added, 'Susan is getting on.'

'Getting on, dear? Getting on with what?'

It was hopeless, Linda thought. One couldn't make them understand anything. They simply weren't normal.

After Mr. Dyke had left for the station she had gone to put her arms round Susan to cheer her up.

'You can confide in me, darling. I know all about it. Just treat me as if I were your very own sister.'

Susan had looked altogether bewildered.

'Did he try to kiss you? I know he was terribly in love.'

Susan had looked at her for a moment with the most absolute contempt. Then she had given a short laugh, and said: 'Linda, you are impertinent without being funny.'

Linda had complained to Dick, but for once he had taken his sister's side.

'My dear child, you can surely see that that wasn't a question you could ask or she could answer.'

'I don't see it at all,' Linda had said. 'Unnatural, that's what you all are,' and she had refused to kiss him good-night.

It was not till some time after that that she discovered that Susan was writing a book.

'Did you find the plot abroad?' she asked wonderingly.

Increasingly she felt the necessity of impressing the Tarletons. But how was one to set about it?

Love affairs were no good. They never seemed surprised or shocked or even interested. Nothing that she did or was affected them at all, except with slight distaste. They praised laboriously. They reproved rarely. They commented never. There was only one way in which she dazzled them – her hair. And even that, she supposed, she had not achieved.

She remembered the conversation with Demetrius, and how Susan had said, 'I shan't feel responsible for my hair until I dye it.' Then she looked at herself in the glass. Her head really was

very lovely – spun out of 'cellos and violins, squirrels and mahogany and October. Surely it was much more her own coming from God than from a beauty specialist? Yet she had been told that it was 'not the gift, but the thought that mattered.' That clearly was what the Tarletons meant.

Every cliché was to Linda an open sesame. Suddenly she felt that she understood her in-laws. They were revealed to her in the terms of little china vases with 'A present from Margate,' on them, bazaar tea-cosies and shell-work boxes. Isn't the concrete, too, a metaphor? Reading without tears, the picture of the cat that precedes the word, the image of a Madonna which does duty for a conception, all of that process of simplification and consummation which takes refuge in or rises to symbols – had not Linda discovered it when suddenly the Tarletons were revealed to her in the phrase, 'It is not the gift, but the thought that matters?'

No one was staying at Tarleton. It was just a family party. It would, after all, Linda thought, have been impossible to do it in front of strangers.

Dinner had been very characteristic. Lord Tarleton had said that it was surprising how few people went to Iceland. The whole family had agreed that P. G. Wodehouse was a man of genius, and that if you were foolish enough not to see his profound, exquisite distinction you need only put it next to Galsworthy's 'Ladies and Gentlemen' presumably intending to show breeding.

Linda had said, 'But I thought you didn't like slang'; and Dick had answered, 'That is where the genius comes in.'

Then Linda had protested, 'But Mr. Galsworthy is very intellectual,' and Dick had said that the danger of making a rule about humanity was that either your characters were exceptions or else they were not human beings; and Susan had explained that profiteering in unhappiness was artistically ruinous, and that she could forgive people everything except being misunderstood.

Linda had said, 'Christ was misunderstood,' and Susan had retorted, 'How cynical you are.'

Then Lady Tarleton had come to the rescue with: 'What a lovely gold dress, dear. It catches the gleams from your hair.'

Linda straightened herself; she tossed her head. All of the

gentility which had been alike her stand-by and her downfall fell from her.

'You like my hair, don't you?' she said.

Because the tone of her voice was painful to them all, Lady Tarleton smiled a little vaguely. Susan curled her lip. Lord Tarleton averted his eyes and withdrew his attention, and Dick looked straight at his wife.

'Well, I don't suppose you ever guessed it, for all your cleverness. But it's dyed.'

Lord Tarleton heard the last word. 'Who has died?' he asked.

Susan said consolingly: 'No, I *never* should have guessed.'

Lady Tarleton murmured: 'It's very pretty, all the same.'

Linda looked at them. Where had her bombshell disappeared to? No one had even asked her how she had done it, by what means the miracle had been achieved.

An overwhelming feeling of discouragement came over her. Her eyes filled with tears. Uncertainly, as if she couldn't quite see where she was going, she left the room.

'It was very brave of her to tell us,' commented Lady Tarleton with gentle decisiveness.

Dick dashed out after his wife.

'My darling,' he said, 'my very own absurd, magnificent liar.'

The Dream of Ah Lum [1]

BY THOMAS BURKE

In the up-stairs room of the Tea House of the Amber Chrysanthemum, Ah Lum was wiping the marble tables for the late afternoon service, and singing as he worked; happily without knowledge of the end to which his song would bring him.

He sang as though his heart were a bird beating its wings against the bars of its cage. He sang of his own country, of the too-much-celebrated porcelain tower and river of sincerity; and though the voice would have driven a professor of the true song into the seventh fury, the passion behind it would have set the rest of the world wondering that one man could carry such misery and live. He went from song to song, a snatch here and a snatch there. Under the overcast sky of the London June, he sang of green seas, of house and garden, of prosperous fields, of almond and cherry flower and water-lily, of radiant skies and lanterned midnights and the faint hot smell of city streets at evening, of war and wine and feasts and travails, of man's need of money, of the beauty of his fathers before him. He sang of all those material things of life from which the people of his country have made their poetry.

He sang . . .

But if you ever knew the Tea House of the Amber Chrysanthemum, you knew Ah Lum and his noises. Even if you never ate or drank there, you must have seen it if your business led you any afternoon to the wharves and warehouses at the end of the Causeway. You might have reached West India Dock Road in good humour with yourself and the day, and, reaching it, would be conscious of a pervading disquiet; something more than the Eastern hush that hangs in the air of this quarter; something faint and untraceable that clouded your heart and pressed upon it.

At first you might imagine that something Asiatic in your Asiatic neighbourhood was being done that should not be done; but as you

[1] From *East of Mansion House*, by Thomas Burke, by permission of Messrs. Cassell & Co., Ltd.

walked on you would perceive that you were taking this disquiet through the ear, and that it came from the far end of the Causeway; and when you had got that far you located it as a voice of lamentation coming from a little place just below the archway. You remember it now? The little faded place, with a bead curtain to its door, and in its window a few tins of fruit and fish upon a permanent foundation of seaweed; and on the door posts Chinese ideographs announcing its name and business, and murmuring of its excellent appointments for table games.

It was popular and prosperous. It never invited. Its door was always closed. But it did well among its own people, and the voice of Ah Lum spread news of it to casual white wanderers, who spread the news further. They liked to think that they only had discovered it; it permitted them the mild swagger of showing it to others, which they did as though they had invented it. Perhaps Hing Pu, its owner, knew something of the little corners of the human heart – most restaurant-keepers do – and, by not inviting, held out a subtle invitation.

Once a wanderer had entered the Amber Chrysanthemum, to discover the mystery of this passion behind closed doors, and had tasted Hing Pu's fried noodles and bean-cake chop suey, he came again with a friend, and the kitchen – and sometimes the back room – held the attention that Ah Lum had first attracted. And Ah Lum, when he wasn't serving, would sit somewhere unseen, with a guitar, and bring something of the colour of his home streets to the bleak faces of his customers.

He was the complete exile. His body was in a strange land, but his heart was set among the long fields and temples of the Middle Kingdom. Here, in this narrow street of little shops and lodging-houses, isolated from the haste and strength of the West, he had around him whiffs and echoes of his home, and from these scraps he built his dreams. He was not remarkable to the eye. Wanderers who had been led by the voice and the place into thinking of glamour and romance and some fantastic figure of a performer, were disappointed when they saw a young man in a lounge suit and coloured tie and brown boots, serving pots of tea. The clothes did not 'go' with the singing, and the set, square face did

not repeat the agony of the voice. But the few who had perception noted that the long eyes held the expression of seeing something beautiful from afar.

Old Quong Lee, who kept the little store just opposite, noted it. He noted many silly things that others passed, while really important things, like the current price of tea or a week of wet weather, escaped him. He too was an exile, but if he had any dreams, he never wailed them to the air. He had not the gift of song, but he had a more expressive gift – the gift of silence; and his physical presence behind the window of his store said Exile as firmly as the voice of his young friend. For they were friends, as philosophers and poets often are. His work done, Ah Lum would call most every night upon the old man, and talk with him of their home and of the hills where the spring is born, and they would look out upon the grey walls and the grey falling rain and sigh.

It fell frequently to Quong Lee to explain to casual customers in his shop the noises that came from the Tea House. 'It iss a young man,' he would say, picking his words one by one, 'who singss of hiss country. He iss not happy. He want all time to go away to hiss country. He no can. He no cash. So he singss of hiss country and it makes him not-so sorrow.'

And the Englishman, who couldn't understand wanting something and not going for it, would ask: 'But can't he save up money, or get some one to ship him out?'

'Save-up? Huh! He have cash – plenty cash. But he playss puck-a-poo. To make more cash quick – see? All time he play puck-a-poo. All time he never winss. So he no cash. And no friendss.'

'Take him a long time to get back that way. Must be a fool – what?'

And Quong Lee would blink and tie up the purchase. Perhaps he didn't care whether Ah Lum was a fool or not; perhaps he didn't want Ah Lum to go away. Certainly the Tea House didn't, for his singing brought custom, and it was only in his song that he was miserable. In his work he was deft and clean and serious, and he spoke good English. He mixed cheerfully with his fellows,

and went to the pictures and the Poplar Hippodrome and the Salvation Army with them; and for long bus-rides round London; and took his daily gamble in puck-a-poo with that zest which the workshop punter brings to the study of the early racing editions. If you had never heard him sing you would have said that he was happy; but his songs betrayed him.

Whence he came, nobody knew or was curious to ask. He had arrived among them some ten years ago, from Cardiff, and had taken a job for a month – the job he still held; and through all that time his passion for home was at battle with his passion for gambling. Often luck had been with him for a week, and he had spoken of an increasing fund, of a few more weeks of equal prosperity, and then – home. But, growing impatient, he would take his whole store to a fan-tan room, and at the end of the evening would crawl penniless down the Causeway to the London bed where he must still rest.

But if luck did not serve him, friendship did. At least, it gave him what he had asked for, if that can be called service, though the human heart is so made that it will often cherish the dirty stone picked up in the gutter above the brightest box of marbles presented by the keeper of the bazaar. In the event, luck was, perhaps, kinder to him than friendship.

It was Fanny Freyne who did it. Fanny liked the Causeway, and bought tea and ginger and lily-root flour there, and sometimes had a meal with friends at Hing Pu's restaurant. There she met Ah Lum, and heard his singing, and laughed at it, and later heard the cause of it. They became casual distant acquaintances. Both were quiet and a little withdrawn, and while she found interest in his neat appearance and his baby smile and his forlorn condition, and liked his clear deference to herself, he saw her as a marvellous and beautiful creature who had stooped to listen to his tale.

One idle afternoon, when few customers were about, he told her the secrets of his heart. He told her of the town on the river where he belonged; how he left it when he was sixteen, and came to England with his father. How he had held always the memory of those scenes, and how, wherever he looked, they were before

his eyes. He told her of the coming day for which he lived, when he would go back there, and buy a waterside farm, and take an agreeable wife who would give him many splendid sons. He told her of the place he would occupy there among the serious and dignified people of his own province.

And Fanny, interested, as all women are, in being taken into the confidence of a young man – even a yellow young man – thought about it all and wanted to help him. Not that the sorrows of a lowly Chink were any business of hers, or that she could, without drawing unpleasant talk upon herself, do anything for him: it wouldn't have been quite the thing. A Chink, she had been taught, may be all right, but he's still a Chink; just as an Englishman may be all wrong, but is still an Englishman. There was no getting away from the fact. But she had no worries of her own, so it pleased her to dally with a chance of missionary meddling with other people's affairs, and of pushing the poor benighted creature towards his heart's desire.

So she spoke to her father about it, and he told her that there were societies for that sort of thing – getting poor people home to their own countries – and he'd speak to his boss about it. His boss heard the story, which Fanny's father dressed up with some humour, and said he'd see what he could do about it. He went himself to the Causeway, and got an hour's British amusement from the nasal howling of Ah Lum; and in his turn, touched with the fever of doing something for somebody, he spoke to a man higher up.

The man higher up went to see the theatrical exile, and the tale of Ah Lum and his songs made a few chuckles in a dull club smoking-room and lightened the atmosphere of a dull dinner-table. Half a dozen of them made a pilgrimage to the restaurant of Hing Pu; and as the Englishman is always most ready to help when he's being amused, it wasn't long before the tale got higher still, and somebody up there said he reckoned they could work it for the fellow somehow.

So they did. Fanny Freyne had been a better missionary than she knew. From her idle interest, Ah Lum's sorrow became not only known and popular beyond his narrow Causeway: it became

a matter of competition among energetic idlers. It's wonderful how many people you can interest in giving time and service to a cause if you don't ask them to give it. Ah Lum would never have been sent to the home of peace and colour for which he longed if he had gone about begging people to help him. He didn't beg. Unknowingly, he borrowed the successful methods of the publicity agents, and made a song about it, and a joke of himself. His guitar and his voice did what the most necessitous and pathetic 'case' could never do.

Within two months of Fanny's first word, she arrived one afternoon at Hing Pu's place in a mild excitement; and when Ah Lum had served her with tea, she told him she had news for him.

'I been working for you. It's taken a long time, but I done it. Guess what I done?'

Ah Lum smiled and said nothing.

'You know all them swells that been coming down here lately? Well, I worked that. Now, suppose – suppose you was sailing for China next week. Eh? Out of all this fog and slush. To China. Eh?'

Ah Lum made a long noise like *ai-eee* and into his eyes came the far-away look.

'All those flowers you told me about. And sunshine every day. And all the old places that you haven't seen for years. Eh? How'd it be?'

Ai-eee! He looked through the window into the Causeway and its tiny shops, and into the window of Quong Lee's store, and up at the sky that held the hue of a wrung dish-cloth. 'What iss the good? I never get to China. Never. *Ai-eee!*'

'That's where you're wrong, son. Wrong. You will get there. Listen. You're going to China next week. Understand? I've worked it. I been telling people about you – them people what have been down here to see you. High-up people. And there's papers coming to-morrow – government papers that'll take you right home wherever you want to go. They'll come to-morrow. And me or somebody else'll bring 'em. And next Wednesday you'll be on the boat going home. How's that, now? Eh? That make you happy – eh?'

'Happy?' For a moment it seemed that he had not followed her words, or was still translating them. Then he folded his hands and beamed, and spoke his thanks. 'Oh, yess. O-oh, yess. But – is it true? Really true that I go to China? You are making a joke? After so many years . . . it does not seem true.'

'No, reely. Honest. I've fixed it. I have reely.'

'Oh, miss, you are too good! It is wonderful. To be really going to China at last. It iss . . .' He turned his face away and unclasped his hands.

'There'll be nothing for you to pay. Those papers'll take you just where you want to go. Next Wednesday, it'll be.'

'Oh, miss, you are so good to a nobody! But why me? – there are so many who would like to go back to China.'

'Just because you're you, I suppose. They liked your songs, those fellers. And they're high-up people. You can reckon it as all settled.'

'O-oh, miss! It iss . . . *Ai-eee!*' and he finished his thanks in a hubble of Cantonese.

His face held nothing of his inward emotion; only the eyes looked steadily beyond the window as though lifted towards hills and hot skies, while the liquid syllables poured out of him like an offering of wine before the temple. What he was saying Fanny didn't know, but she was satisfied. Her surprise had come off, and she had made him happy. The smile that he wore about his daily work, the smile that hid the hunger of his heart, was gone; one does not smile in supreme happiness. In its place was the expression of the lover who sees his love approaching within his reach, while hardly believing that it is truly she.

'You are so good, miss, to take this trouble of me. Shall I sing some song?'

Fanny smiled back at him. There was nobody but themselves in the up-stairs room, and it was pleasant to have him make a noise for her alone. He took his guitar and leaned against a table and sang a wilder song than any she had heard him sing: at once a pæan and a wail, as of wanderers returning from peril and encounter; and he swayed his body and sang as though possessed of the soul of all who come home after long years. It thrilled her

to know that she had been able, by the simple act of 'speaking' for him, to move him to this intensity.

She hoped nothing would go wrong with the arrangements. It would be awful if, somehow, those papers didn't come, after she had moved him like this. Under the thrill she had a sudden fear that perhaps after all they wouldn't come, and with it a picture of Ah Lum when she broke the news to him. He might do something dreadful; you never knew with these foreigners. Or perhaps at the last moment the boat wouldn't be able to take him. Or the papers might not be in order. Or the ship might be wrecked on the way out. But it was certain they would come, and everything would be all right, because dad's boss's friend had had a letter from some office saying they were coming. Oh, they were sure to come!

And then the superlative noise that Ah Lum was making brought people to the tea-room to inquire the cause of it; and he came swiftly quiet and closed his lips and went about his duties, ignoring all facetious questions. Fanny went out, still wondering what he'd do if it happened that she had promised him heaven and couldn't deliver it.

She did deliver it. The papers came, brought by three of the people concerned in the business who hadn't yet seen the quaint creature whom they had befriended. The quaint creature behaved with becoming quaintness. Hing Pu bowed them upstairs, and then produced Ah Lum and offered him as though he were a dish from the kitchen. Ah Lum folded his hands and bowed, and the high-up friend, who was known and distantly respected for his after-dinner speeches, made a five-minute delivery in that vein, though its fine flavour escaped half his audience. Then he handed over the papers, with minute instructions about the boat's sailing day and its berth at Tilbury, and these were repeated by a young man who had spent some time in the East. As they were handed over, Hing Pu put his hand on them.

'There iss no money in here, sir?'

'Money? No – why? Only passes.'

'It iss not safe to give him money. He play with it and lose it.'

'Oh! Well, he might trade those passes. Here – we'll keep these till Wednesday. We'll bring 'em down Wednesday – or get Mr. Hickson to keep them for him. That'll be best – eh?'

Ah Lum made no comment. He accepted his own weakness and bowed. He did not burst into profuse thanks for their kindness. He said they were too kind, but his face expressed nothing and seemed to hide no more than the face of a statue. He might have been acknowledging the loan of the evening paper. But Fanny knew better. She knew what simple hot emotions were crowding and beating behind that mask. The long look in the eyes that met hers reported things too deep for words or gestures. He was going home. At last he was going home . . .

That evening the news was all round the quarter, and there were feasts and invitations to feasts. Hing Pu gave one with Ah Lum as the guest of honour. The owner of the house where Ah Lum mostly played puck-a-poo gave one. The place at the corner of Pennyfield gave one. For five days Ah Lum was the centre of many tables, and the subject of all gossip.

Always there were comings and goings in these two streets; men who stayed a month and departed, and came back next year and departed again, while Quong Lee and Hing Pu and the other shopkeepers sat steady year by year. But the one man who most yearned to depart had never had the chance; he could not pay his passage, and was incompetent to work his passage. Now, after many years, his hope had been achieved; and those who had heard everlastingly of the river farm among the hills, and whose afternoon sleep had been worried by that wailing, were perhaps glad to know that they had heard the end of it.

Certainly they came forward with ceremonies of departure more fitting to an honoured guest than to one of themselves; they seemed to be celebrating something more than Ah Lum's happiness; but he was too enfolded in his fortune to perceive anything in their attentions but honest congratulations. Already he seemed withdrawn from Limehouse and Poplar, already halfway towards China; no longer a feature of the Causeway, but a loiterer who could not be taken into the common run of things; who could only be entertained. He even stood out of the games

of puck-a-poo; and though Hing Pu advanced him a week's money, he seemed to lose interest in the tables, and played only a game or two.

Right up to the Wednesday evening when he was to take the train to Tilbury they crowded him with feasts. Then in the hour of his departure they turned out to send him off, and the Causeway was astir with olive faces and babbling tongues. The doorway to the Tea House was impassable. Fanny was there, and her father, and the high-up friend, who had nothing better to do that evening, had brought three new friends from the West to see this curious corner they had heard so much about.

In the light mist of the Causeway, before the shuttered shops, they moved without noise back and forth, as one. Trains grumbled across the arch at the end. A cart came through, driving a wedge into the crowd. Quong Lee, wearing still the robes of the monarchy, sat in his window staring at nothing. Somebody unseen started to wail one of Ah Lum's songs, mimicking his noise. There was a smell of dust and sandalwood; the smell of Ah Lum's home.

Then the hero appeared at the bottom of the steps leading from the tea-room. He was dressed for his journey in a thick ulster and cloth cap and trousers that were a little too long for him. He carried his belongings in a little blue sack that dangled from his arm. Behind him came Hing Pu. At the door they turned to each other, and nodded a casual farewell. Ah Lum looked at the crowd with vacant eye, and then at the shops and the roofs, giving them too farewell. The high-up friend who had brought the papers came forward with them.

Ah Lum gave him a bow and one of his wide slow smiles, and said: 'It iss very kind of you. T-hank you.' He took the papers and put them in his pocket. 'If you escusse me, I will take just a minute to say good-bye to my friend over there.' He nodded towards Quong Lee's, pushed through the crowd, giving a word here and there, and entered the shop.

The crowd turned again to talk among itself, and Fanny and her dad showed the new gentlemen the inside of the Tea House, and of one or two of the shops on the other side, and expounded

commonplaces which were mysteries to them. Then the high-up friend looked at his watch and said:

'Look here, he'll never get that train if he don't hurry. Fetch him out. I say – tell him, somebody.'

Fanny's father struggled into Quong Lee's shop and found Quong Lee at the counter. Ah Lum was not there.

'Where is he? He'll lose the train if he ain't careful. What's he up to? He ain't gone playing fan-tan, has he, the fool?'

Quong Lee turned to his inner door. 'He hass gone into there.'

'What for? Call him out. He's only got a minute or two.'

'I will see.' Quong Lee moved from his stool and floated into the back room. Then he called over his shoulder, 'He iss still heah.'

'What's he up to?'

'Come and see.'

The three gentlemen and Fanny were now in the shop, and they pressed forward, wondering what they were to come and see. Over each other's shoulders they saw Ah Lum flat on the floor. And, sticking up from his middle, like an arresting finger, they saw the shining haft of a kris. Quong Lee stooped over him and got up quickly.

'He iss dead.'

Five people said 'Dead?'

'Uh-huh.'

Five people began sentences that were never finished.

'But what – '

'Why should – '

'What on earth – '

'Who on earth – '

'What the devil – '

They all turned to Quong Lee then; and the high-up friend got a clear question out.

'But what on earth *for*? After we've done all this for him. What *for*?'

'It wass you gentlemen.'

'Us?'

'Huh. He hass told me. You were too kind.'

'Told you what? Too kind? How? Gone to all this trouble over him to get him home. And then . . . I don't understand it.'

'It iss simple. He got no home. He never seen China. Not know China. Not want to know China. He wass born here – in Step-nee. He love England. He love London. And when he know you send him to foreign country – to China – where he got no friend, no home, and not know their ways – he go afraid. He try to run away, but got no place to go. He 'fraid you find him. He cannot go China. He no can. So he die.'

'But confound it – he was always wanting to go back. He said so. Always singing about it, they said. Always unhappy because he couldn't go home.'

'Always veh happy here.'

'Well, I'm hanged! Then all these songs and that – all this talk about his home and his farm and China – all nothing, eh?'

'Yess – no. He veh happy here, but he like to be same as others, and be sad because he iss far away from his own country.'

'I see. He was just a humbug, then?'

Quong Lee blinked. 'No, mister. He wass a poet.'

The Higgler[1]

BY A. E. COPPARD

On a cold April afternoon a higgler was driving across Shag Moor in a two-wheeled cart.

H. WITLOW
Dealer in Poultry
DINNOP

was painted on the hood; the horse was of mean appearance but notorious ancestry. A high upland common was this moor, two miles from end to end, and full of furze and bracken. There were no trees and not a house, nothing but a line of telegraph poles following the road, sweeping with rigidity from north to south; nailed upon one of them a small scarlet notice to stone-throwers was prominent as a wound. On so high and wide a region as Shag Moor the wind always blew, or if it did not quite blow there was a cool activity in the air. The furze was always green and growing, and, taking no account of seasons, often golden. Here in summer solitude lounged and snoozed; at other times, as now, it shivered and looked sinister.

Higglers in general are ugly and shrewd, old and hard, crafty and callous, but Harvey Witlow, though shrewd, was not ugly; he was hard but not old, crafty but not at all unkind. If you had eggs to sell he would buy them, by the score he would, or by the long hundred. Other odds and ends he would buy or do, paying good bright silver, bartering a bag of apples, carrying your little pig to market, or fetching a tree from the nurseries. But the season was backward, eggs were scarce, trade was bad – by crumps, it was indeed! – and as he crossed the moor Harvey could not help discussing the situation with himself.

'If things don't change, and change for the better, and change soon, I can't last and I can't endure it; I'll be damned and done, and I'll have to sell,' he said, prodding the animal with the butt of his whip, 'this cob. And,' he said, as if in afterthought, prod-

[1] From *Fishmonger's Fiddle*, by A. E. Coppard, by permission of Messrs. Jonathan Cape, Ltd.

ding the footboard, 'this cart, and go back to the land. And I'll have lost my fifty pounds. Well, that's what war does for you. It does it for you, sir,' he announced sharply to the vacant moor, 'and it does it for me. Fifty pounds! I was better off in the war. I was better off working for farmers – much. But it's no good chattering about it, it's the trick of life; when you get so far, then you can go and order your funeral. Get along, Dodger!'

The horse responded briskly for a few moments.

'I tell ye,' said Harvey adjuring the ambient air, 'you can go and order your funeral. Get along, Dodger!'

Again Dodger got along.

'Then there's Sophy, what about Sophy and me?'

He was not engaged to Sophy Daws, not exactly, but he was keeping company with her. He was not pledged or affianced, he was just keeping company with her. But Sophy, as he knew, not only desired a marriage with Mr. Witlow, she expected it, and expected it soon. So did her parents, her friends, and everybody in the village, including the postman who didn't live in it but wished he did, and the parson who did live in it but wished he didn't.

'Well, that's damned and done, fair damned and done now, unless things take a turn, and soon, so it's no good chattering about it.'

And just then and there things did take a turn. He had never been across the moor before; he was prospecting for trade. At the end of Shag Moor he saw standing back on the common, fifty yards from the road, a neat square house set in a little farm. Twenty acres, perhaps. The house was girded by some white palings; beside it was a snug orchard in a hedge covered with blackthorn bloom. It was very green and pleasant in front of the house. The turf was cleared and closely cropped, some ewes were grazing and under the blackthorn, out of the wind, lay half a dozen lambs, but what chiefly moved the imagination of Harvey Witlow was a field on the far side of the house. It had a small rickyard with a few small stacks in it; everything here seemed on the small scale, but snug, very snug; and in that field and yard

were hundreds of fowls, hundreds, of good breed, and mostly white. Leaving his horse to sniff the greensward, the higgler entered a white wicket gateway and passed to the back of the house, noting as he did so a yellow waggon inscribed *Elizabeth Sadgrove, Prattle Corner.*

At the kitchen door he was confronted by a tall gaunt woman of middle age with a teapot in her hands.

'Afternoon, ma'am. Have you anything to sell?' began Harvey Witlow, tilting his hat with a confident affable air. The tall woman was cleanly dressed, a superior person; her hair was grey. She gazed at him.

'It's cold,' he continued. She looked at him as uncomprehendingly as a mouse might look at a gravestone.

'I'll buy any mottal thing, ma'am. Except trouble; I'm full up wi' that already. Eggs? Fowls?'

'I've not seen you before,' commented Mrs. Sadgrove a little bleakly, in a deep husky voice.

'No, 'tis the first time as ever I drove in this part. To tell you the truth, ma'am, I'm new to the business. Six months. I was in the war a year ago. Now I'm trying to knock up a connection. Difficult work. Things are very quiet.'

Mrs. Sadgrove silently removed the lid of the teapot, inspected the interior of the pot with an intent glance, and then replaced the lid as if she had seen a blackbeetle there.

'Ah, well,' sighed the higgler. 'You've a neat little farm here, ma'am.'

'It's quiet enough,' said she.

'Sure it is, ma'am. Very lonely.'

'And it's difficult work, too.' Mrs. Sadgrove almost smiled.

'Sure it is, ma'am; but you does it well, I can see. Oh, you've some nice little ricks of corn, eh! I does well enough at the dealing now and again, but it's teasy work, and mostly I don't earn enough to keep my horse in shoe leather.'

'I've a few eggs, perhaps,' said she.

'I could do with a score or two, ma'am, if you could let me have 'em.'

'You'll have to come all my way if I do.'

'Name your own price, ma'am, if you don't mind trading with me.'

'Mind! Your money's as good as my own, isn't it?'

'It must be, ma'am. That's meaning no disrespects to you,' the young higgler assured her hastily, and was thereupon invited to enter the kitchen.

A stone floor with two or three mats; open hearth with burning logs; a big dresser painted brown, carrying a row of white cups on brass hooks and shelves of plates overlapping each other like the scales of fish. A dark settle half hid a flight of stairs with a small gate at the top. Under the window a black sofa, deeply indented, invited you a little repellingly, and in the middle of the room stood a large table, exquisitely scrubbed, with one end of it laid for tea. Evidently a living-room as well as kitchen. A girl, making toast at the fire, turned as the higgler entered. Beautiful she was: red hair, a complexion like the inside of a nut, blue eyes, and the hands of a lady. He saw it all at once, jacket of bright green wool, black dress, grey stockings and shoes, and forgot his errand, her mother, his fifty pounds, Sophy – momentarily he forgot everything. The girl stared strangely at him. He was tall, clean-shaven, with a loop of black hair curling handsomely over one side of his brow.

'Good afternoon,' said Harvey Witlow, as softly as if he had entered a church.

'Some eggs, Mary,' Mrs. Sadgrove explained. The girl laid down her toasting-fork. She was less tall than her mother, whom she resembled only enough for the relationship to be noted. Silently she crossed the kitchen and opened a door that led into a dairy. Two pans of milk were creaming on a bench there, and on the flags were two great baskets filled with eggs.

'How many are there?' asked Mrs. Sadgrove, and the girl replied: 'Fifteen score, I think.'

'Take the lot, higgler?'

'Yes, ma'am,' he cried eagerly, and ran out to his cart and fetched a number of trays. In them he packed the eggs as the girl handed them to him from the baskets. Mrs. Sadgrove left them together. For a time the higgler was silent.

'No,' at length he murmured, 'I've never been this road before.'

There was no reply from Mary. Sometimes their fingers touched, and often, as they bent over the eggs, her bright hair almost brushed his face.

'It is a loneish spot,' he ventured again.

'Yes,' said Mary Sadgrove.

When the eggs were all transferred her mother came in again.

'Would you buy a few pullets, higgler?'

'Any number, ma'am,' he declared quickly. Any number; by crumps, the tide was turning! He followed the mother into the yard, and there again she left him, waiting. He mused about the girl and wondered about the trade. If they offered him ten thousand chicken, he'd buy them, somehow, he would! She had stopped in the kitchen. Just in there she was, just behind him, a few feet away. Over the low wall of the yard a fat black pony was strolling in a field of bright greensward. In the yard, watching him, was a young gander, and on a stone staddle beside it lay a dead thrush on its back, its legs stiff in the air. The girl stayed in the kitchen; she was moving about, though, he could hear her; perhaps she was spying at him through the window. Twenty million eggs he would buy if Mrs. Sadgrove had got them. She was gone a long time. It was very quiet. The gander began to comb its white breast with its beak. Its three-toed feet were a most tender pink, shaped like wide diamonds, and at each of the three forward points there was a toe like a small blanched nut. It lifted one foot, folding the webs, and hid it under its wing and sank into a resigned meditation on one leg. It had a blue eye that was meek – it had two, but you could only see one at a time – a meek blue eye, set in a pink rim that gave it a dissolute air, and its beak had raw red nostrils as if it suffered from the damp. Altogether a beautiful bird. And in some absurd way it resembled Mrs. Sadgrove.

'Would you sell that young gollan, ma'am?' Harvey inquired when the mother returned.

Yes, she would sell him, and she also sold him two dozen pullets. Harvey packed the fowls in a crate.

'Come on,' he cried, cuddling the squawking gander in his arms,

'you needn't be afeared of me, I never kills anything afore Saturdays.'

He roped it by its leg to a hook inside his cart. Then he took out his bag of money, paid Mrs. Sadgrove her dues, said 'Good day, ma'am, good day,' and drove off without seeing another sign or stitch of that fine young girl.

'Get along, Dodger, get along wi' you.' They went bowling along for nearly an hour, and then he could see the landmark on Dan'el Green's Hill, a windmill that never turned, though it looked a fine competent piece of architecture, just beyond Dinnop.

Soon he reached his cottage and was chaffing his mother, a hearty buxom dame, who stayed at home and higgled with any chance callers. At this business she was perhaps more enlightened than her son. It was almost a misfortune to get into her clutches.

'How much you give for this?' he cried, eyeing with humorous contempt an object in a coop that was neither flesh nor rude red herring.

'O crumps,' he declared, when she told him, 'I am damned and done!'

'Go on with you, that's a good bird, I tell you, with a full heart, as will lay in a month.'

'I doubt it's a hen at all,' he protested. 'Oh, what a ravenous beak! Damned and done I am.'

Mrs. Witlow's voice began indignantly to rise.

'Oh, well,' mused her son, 'it's thrifty perhaps. It ain't quite right, but it's not so wrong as to make a fuss about, especially as I be pretty sharp set. And if it's hens you want,' he continued triumphantly, dropping the crate of huddled fowls before her, 'there's hens for you; and a gander! There's a gander for you, if it's a gander you want.'

Leaving them all in his cottage yard he went and stalled the horse and cart at the inn, for he had no stable of his own. After supper he told his mother about the Sadgroves of Prattle Corner. 'Prettiest girl you ever seen, but the shyest mottal alive. Hair like a squirrel, lovely.'

'An't you got to go over and see Sophy to-night?' inquired his mother, lighting the lamp.

'Oh lord, if I an't clean forgot that! Well, I'm tired, shan't go to-night. See her to-morrow.'

2

Mrs. Sadgrove had been a widow for ten years – and she was glad of it. Prattle Corner was her property, she owned it and farmed it with the aid of a little old man and a large lad. The older this old man grew, and the less wages he received (for Elizabeth Sadgrove was reputed a 'grinder'), the more ardently he worked; the older the lad grew the less he laboured and the more he swore. She was thriving. She was worth money, was Mrs. Sadgrove. Ah! And her daughter Mary, it was clear, had received an education fit for a lord's lady; she had been at a seminary for gentlefolks' females until she was seventeen. Well, whether or no, a clock must run as you time it; but it wronged her for the work of a farm, it spoiled her, it completely deranged her for the work of a farm; and this was a pity and foolish, because some day the farm was coming to her as didn't know hay from a bull's foot.

All this, and more, the young higgler quickly learned, and plenty more he soon divined. Business began to flourish with him now; his despair was gone, he was established, he could look forward, to whatever it was he wanted to look forward, with equanimity and such pleasurable anticipation as the chances and charges of life might engender. Every week, and twice a week, he would call at the farm, and though these occasions had their superior business inducements they often borrowed a less formal tone and intention.

'Take a cup of tea, higgler?' Mrs. Sadgrove would abruptly invite him; and he would drink tea and discourse with her for half an hour on barndoor ornithology, on harness, and markets, the treatment of swine, the wear and tear of gear. Mary, always present, was always silent, seldom uttering a word to the higgler; yet a certain grace emanated from her to him, an interest, a light, a

favour, circumscribed indeed by some modesty, shyness, some inhibition, that neither of them had the wit or the opportunity to overcome.

One evening he pulled up at the white palings of Prattle Corner. It was a calm evening in May, the sun was on its down-going, chaffinches and wrens sung ceaselessly. Mary in the orchard was heavily veiled; he could see her over the hedge, holding a brush in her gloved hands, and a bee skep. A swarm was clustered like a great gnarl on the limb of an apple tree. Bloom was thickly covering the twigs. She made several timid attempts to brush the bees into the skep, but they resented this.

'They knows if you be afraid of 'em,' bawled Harvey; 'I better come and give you a hand.'

When he took the skep and brush from her she stood like one helpless, released by fate from a task ill-understood and gracelessly waived. But he liked her shyness, her almost uncouth immobility.

'Never mind about that,' said Harvey, as she unfastened her veil, scattering the white petals that had collected upon it; 'when they kicks they hurts, but I've been stung so often that I'm 'nocolated against 'em. They knows if you be afraid of 'em.'

Wearing neither veil nor gloves he went confidently to the tree, and collected the swarm without mishap.

'Don't want to show no fear of them,' said Harvey. 'Nor of anything else, come to that,' he added with a guffaw, 'nor anybody.'

At that she blushed and thanked him very softly, and she did look straight and clearly at him.

Never anything beyond a blush and a thank-you. When, in the kitchen, or the parlour, Mrs. Sadgrove sometimes left them alone together Harvey would try a lot of talk, blarneying talk or sensible talk, or talk about events in the world that was neither the one nor the other. No good. The girl's responses were ever brief and confused. Why was this? Again and again he asked himself that question. Was there anything the matter with her? Nothing that you could see; she was a bright and beautiful being. And it was not contempt, either, for despite her fright, her voicelessness,

her timid eyes, he divined her friendly feeling for himself; and he would discourse to his own mother about her and her mother:

'They are well-up people, you know, well-off, plenty of money and nothing to do with it. The farm's their own, freehold. A whole row of cottages she's got, too, in Smoorton Comfrey, so I heard; good cottages, well let. She's worth a few thousands, I warrant. Mary's beautiful. I took a fancy to that girl the first moment I see her. But she's very highly cultivated – and, of course, there's Sophy.'

To this enigmatic statement Mrs. Witlow offered no response; but mothers are inscrutable beings to their sons, always.

Once he bought some trees of cherries from Mrs. Sadgrove, and went on a July morning to pick the fruit. Under the trees Mary was walking slowly to and fro, twirling a clapper to scare away the birds. He stood watching her from the gateway. Among the bejewelled trees she passed, turning the rattle with a listless air, as if beating time to a sad music that only she could hear. The man knew that he was deeply fond of her. He passed into the orchard, bade her Good-morning, and, lifting his ladder into one of the trees nearest the hedge, began to pluck cherries. Mary moved slimly in her white frock up and down a shady avenue in the orchard waving the clapper. The brightness of sun and sky was almost harsh; there was a little wind that feebly lifted the despondent leaves. He had doffed his coat; his shirt was white and clean. The lock of dark hair drooped over one side of his forehead; his face was brown and pleasant, his bare arms brown and powerful. From his high perch among the leaves Witlow watched for the girl to draw near to him in her perambulation. Knavish birds would scatter at her approach, only to drop again into the trees she had passed. His soul had an immensity of longing for her, but she never spoke a word to him. She would come from the shade of the little avenue, through the dumb trees that could only bend to greet her, into the sunlight whose dazzle gilded her own triumphant bloom. Fine! Fine! And always as she passed his mind refused to register a single thought he could offer her, or else his tongue would refuse to utter it. But his glance never left her face until she had passed out of sight again, and then he

would lean against the ladder in the tree, staring down at the ground, seeing nothing or less than nothing, except a field mouse climbing to the top of a coventry bush in the hedge below him, nipping off one thick leaf and descending with the leaf in its mouth. Sometimes Mary rested at the other end of the avenue; the clapper would be silent and she would not appear for – oh, hours! She never rested near the trees Witlow was denuding. The mouse went on ascending and descending, and Witlow filled his basket, and shifted his stand, and wondered.

At noon he got down and sat on the hedge bank to eat a snack of lunch. Mary had gone indoors for hers, and he was alone for a while. Capriciously enough, his thoughts dwelt upon Sophy Daws. Sophy was a fine girl, too; not such a lady as Mary Sadgrove – oh, lord, no! Her father was a gamekeeper! – but she was jolly and ample. She had been a little captious lately, said he was neglecting her. That wasn't true; hadn't he been busy? Besides, he wasn't bound to her in any sort of way, and, of course, he couldn't afford any marriage yet awhile. Sophy hadn't got any money, never had any. What she did with her wages – she was a parlourmaid – was a teaser! Harvey grunted a little, and said 'Well!' And that is all he said, and all he thought, about Sophy Daws, then, for he could hear Mary's clapper begin again in a corner of the orchard. He went back to his work. There at the foot of the tree were the baskets full of cherries, and those yet to be filled.

'Phew, but that's hot!' commented the man, 'I'm as dry as a rattle.'

A few cherries had spilled from one basket and lay on the ground. The little furry mouse had found them and was industriously nibbling at one. The higgler nonchalantly stamped his foot upon it, and kept it so for a moment or two. Then he looked at the dead mouse. A tangle of entrails had gushed from its whiskered muzzle.

He resumed his work and the clapper rattled on throughout the afternoon, for there were other cherry trees that other buyers would come to strip in a day or two. At four o'clock he was finished. Never a word had he spoken with Mary, or she with

him. When he went over to the house to pay Mrs. Sadgrove, Mary stopped in the orchard scaring the birds.

'Take a cup of tea, Mr. Witlow,' said Mrs. Sadgrove; and then she surprisingly added, 'Where's Mary?'

'Still a-frightening the birds, and pretty well tired of that, I should think, ma'am.'

The mother had poured out three cups of tea.

'Shall I go and call her in?' he asked rising.

'You might,' said she.

In the orchard the clappering had ceased. He walked all round, and in among the trees, but saw no sign of Mary; nor on the common, nor in the yard. But when he went back to the house Mary was there already, chatting at the table with her mother. She did not greet him, though she ceased talking to her mother as he sat down. After drinking his tea he went off briskly to load the baskets into the cart. As he climbed up to drive off Mrs. Sadgrove came out and stood beside the horse.

'You're off now?' said she.

'Yes, ma'am; all loaded, and thank you.'

She glanced vaguely along the road he had to travel. The afternoon was as clear as wine, the greensward itself dazzled him; lonely Shag Moor stretched away, humped with sweet yellow furze and pilastered with its telegraph poles. No life there, no life at all. Harvey sat on his driving board, musingly brushing the flank of the horse with the trailing whip.

'Ever round this way on Sundays?' inquired the woman, peering up at him.

'Well, not in a manner of speaking, I'm not, ma'am,' he answered her.

The widow laid her hand on the horse's back, patting vaguely. The horse pricked up its ears, as if it were listening.

'If you are, at all, ever, you must look in and have a bit of dinner with us.'

'I will, ma'am, I will.'

'Next Sunday?' she went on.

'I will, ma'am, yes, I will,' he repeated, 'and thank you.'

'One o'clock?' The widow smiled up at him.

'At one o'clock, ma'am; next Sunday; I will, and thank you,' he said.

She stood away from the horse and waved her hand. The first tangible thought that floated mutely out of the higgler's mind as he drove away was: 'I'm damned if I ain't a-going it, Sophy!'

He told his mother of Mrs. Sadgrove's invitation with an air of curbed triumph. 'Come round – she says. Yes – I says – I 'ull. That's right – she says – so do!'

3

On the Sunday morn he dressed himself gallantly. It was again a sweet unclouded day. The church bell at Dinnop had begun to ring. From his window, as he fastened his most ornate tie, Harvey could observe his neighbour's two small children in the next garden, a boy and girl clad for church-going and each carrying a clerical book. The tiny boy placed his sister in front of a hen-roost and, opening his book, began to pace to and fro before her, shrilly intoning: 'Jesus is the shepherd, ring the bell. Oh lord, ring the bell, am I a good boy? Amen. Oh lord, ring the bell.' The little girl bowed her head piously over her book. The lad then picked up from the ground a dish which had contained the dog's food, and presented it momentarily before the lilac bush, the rabbit in a hutch, the axe fixed in a chopping block, and then before his sister. Without lifting her peering gaze from her book she meekly dropped two pebbles in the plate, and the boy passed on, lightly moaning, to the clothes-line post and a cock scooping in some dust.

'Ah, the little impets!' cried Harvey Witlow. 'Here, Toby! Here, Margaret!' He took two pennies from his pocket and lobbed them from the window to the astonished children. As they stooped to pick up the coins Harvey heard the hoarse voice of neighbour Nathan, their father, bawl from his kitchen: 'Come on in, and shut that bloody door, d'y'ear!'

Harnessing his moody horse to the gig, Harvey was soon bowling away to Shag Moor, and as he drove along he sung loudly. He had a pink rose in his buttonhole. Mrs. Sadgrove received

him almost affably, and though Mary was more shy than ever before, Harvey had determined to make an impression. During the dinner he fired off his bucolic jokes, and pleasant tattle of a more respectful and sober nature; but after dinner Mary sat like Patience, not upon a monument, but as if upon a rocking-horse, shy and fearful, and her mother made no effort to inspire her as the higgler did, unsuccessful though he was. They went to the pens to look at the pigs, and as they leaned against the low walls and poked the maudlin inhabitants, Harvey began: 'Reminds me, when I was in the war . . .'

'Were you in the war!' interrupted Mrs. Sadgrove.

'Oh, yes, I was in that war, ah, and there was a pig . . . Danger? Oh lord, bless me, it was a bit dangerous, but you never knew where it was or what it 'ud be at next; it was like the sword of Damockels. There was a bullet once come 'ithin a foot of my head, and it went through a board an inch thick, slap through that board.' Both women gazed at him apprehendingly. 'Why I might 'a been killed, you know,' said Harvey, cocking his eye musingly at the weather-vane on the barn. 'We was in billets at St. Gratien, and one day a chasseur came up – a French yoossar, you know – and he began talking to our sergeant. That was Hubert Luxter, the butcher: died a month or two ago of measles. But this yoossar couldn't speak English at all, and none of us chaps could make sense of him. I never could understand that lingo somehow, never; and though there was half a dozen of us chaps, there, none of us were man enough for it neither. "Nil compree," we says, "non compos." I told him straight: "You ought to learn English," I said, "it's much easier than your kind of bally chatter." So he kept shaping up as if he was holding a rifle, and then he'd say "Fusee – bang!" and then he'd say "cushion" – kept on saying "cushion." Then he gets a bit of chalk and draws on the wall something that looks like a horrible dog, and says "cushion" again.'

'Pig,' interjected Mary Sadgrove softly.

'Yes, yes!' ejaculated Harvey, 'so 'twas! Do you know any French lingo?'

'Oh, yes,' declared her mother, 'Mary knows it very well.'

'Ah,' sighed the higgler. 'I don't, although I been to France. And I couldn't do it now, not for luck nor love. You learnt it, I suppose. Well, this yoossar wants to borrow my rifle, but of course I can't lend him. So he taps on this horrible pig he'd drawn, and then he taps on his own head, and rolls his eyes about dreadful! "Mad?" I says. And that was it, that was it. He'd got a pig on his little farm there what had gone mad, and he wanted us to come and shoot it; he was on leave and he hadn't got any ammunition. So Hubert Luxter he says, "Come on, some of you," and we all goes with the yoossar and shot the pig for him. Ah, that was a pig! And when it died it jumped a somersault just like a rabbit. It had got the mange, and was mad as anything I ever see in my life; it was full of madness. Couldn't hit him at all at first, and it kicked up bobs-a-dying. "Ready, present, fire!" Hubert Luxter says, and bang goes the six of us, and every time we missed him he spotted us and we had to run for our lives.'

As Harvey looked up he caught a glance of the girl fixed on him. She dropped her gaze at once, and, turning away, walked off to the house.

'Come and take a look at the meadow,' said Mrs. Sadgrove to him, and they went into the soft smooth meadow where the black pony was grazing. Very bright and green it was, and very blue the sky. He sniffed at the pink rose in his buttonhole, and determined that come what might he would give it to Mary if he could get a nice quiet chance to offer it. And just then, while he and Mrs. Sadgrove were strolling alone in the soft smooth meadow, quite alone, she suddenly, startlingly, asked him: 'Are you courting anybody?'

'Beg pardon, ma'am?' he exclaimed.

'You haven't got a sweetheart, have you?' she asked, most deliberately.

Harvey grinned sheepishly: 'Ha, ha, ha,' and then he said, 'No.'

'I want to see my daughter married,' the widow went on, significantly.

'Miss Mary!' he cried.

'Yes,' said she; and something in the higgler's veins began to pound rapidly. His breast might have been a revolving cage and

his heart a demon squirrel. 'I can't live for ever,' said Mrs. Sadgrove, almost with levity, 'in fact, not for long, and so I'd like to see her settled soon with some decent understanding young man, one that could carry on here, and not make a mess of things.'

'But, but,' stuttered the understanding young man, 'I'm no scholar, and she's a lady. I'm a poor chap, rough, and no scholar, ma'am. But mind you . . .'

'That doesn't matter at all,' the widow interrupted, 'not as things are. You want a scholar for learning, but for the land . . .'

'Ah, that's right, Mrs. Sadgrove, but . . .'

'I want to see her settled. This farm, you know, with the stock and things are worth nigh upon three thousand pounds.'

'You want a farmer for farming, that's true, Mrs. Sadgrove, but when you come to marriage, well, with her learning and French and all that . . . !'

'A sensible woman will take a man rather than a box of tricks any day of the week,' the widow retorted. 'Education may be a fine thing, but it often costs a lot of foolish money.'

'It do, it do. You want to see her settled?'

'I want to see her settled and secure. When she is twenty-five she comes into five hundred pounds of her own right.'

The distracted higgler hummed and haa-ed in his bewilderment as if he had just been offered the purchase of a dubious duck. 'How old is she, ma'am?' he at last huskily inquired.

'Two-and-twenty nearly. She's a good healthy girl, for I've never spent a pound on a doctor for her, and very quiet she is, and very sensible; but she's got a strong will of her own, though you might not think it or believe it.'

'She's a fine creature, Mrs. Sadgrove, and I'm very fond of her, I don't mind owning up to that, very fond of her I am.'

'Well, think it over, take your time, and see what you think. There's no hurry I hope, please God.'

'I shan't want much time,' he declared with a laugh, 'but I doubt I'm the fair right sort for her.'

'Oh, fair days, fair doings!' said she inscrutably. 'I'm not a long liver, I'm afraid.'

'God forbid, ma'am!' His ejaculation was intoned with deep gravity.

'No, I'm not a long-living woman.' She surveyed him with her calm eyes, and he returned her gaze. Hers was a long sallow face, with heavy lips. Sometimes she would stretch her features (as if to keep them from petrifying) in an elastic grin, and display her dazzling teeth; the lips would curl thickly, no longer crimson, but blue. He wondered if there were any sign of a doom registered upon her gaunt face. She might die, and die soon.

'You couldn't do better than think it over, then, eh?' She had a queer frown as she regarded him.

'I couldn't do worse than not, Mrs. Sadgrove,' he said gaily.

They left it at that. He had no reason for hurrying away, and he couldn't have explained his desire to do so, but he hurried away. Driving along past the end of the moor, and peering back at the lonely farm where they dwelled amid the thick furze snoozing in the heat, he remembered that he had not asked if Mary was willing to marry him! Perhaps the widow took her agreement for granted. That would be good fortune, for otherwise how the devil was he to get round a girl who had never spoken half a dozen words to him! And never would! She was a lady, a girl of fortune, knew her French; but there it was, the girl's own mother was asking him to wed her. Strange, very strange! He dimly feared something, but he did not know what it was he feared. He had still got the pink rose in his buttonhole.

4

At first his mother was incredulous; when he told her of the astonishing proposal she declared he was a joker; but she was soon as convinced of his sincerity as she was amazed at his hesitation. And even vexed: 'Was there anything the matter with this Mary?'

'No, no, no! She's quiet, very quiet indeed, I tell you, but a fine young woman, and a beautiful young woman. Oh, she's all right, right as rain, right as a trivet, right as ninepence. But there's a catch in it somewheres, I fear. I can't see through it yet, but I shall afore long, or I'd have the girl, like a shot I would. 'Tain't the girl, mother, it's the money, if you understand me.'

'Well, I don't understand you, certainly I don't. What about Sophy?'

'Oh lord!' He scratched his head ruefully.

'You wouldn't think of giving this the go-by for Sophy, Harvey, would you! A girl as you ain't even engaged to, Harvey, would you!'

'We don't want to chatter about that,' declared her son. 'I got to think it over, and it's going to tie my wool, I can tell you, for there's a bit of craft somewheres, I'll take my oath. If there ain't, there ought to be!'

Over the alluring project his decision wavered for days, until his mother became mortified at his inexplicable vacillation.

'I tell you,' he cried, 'I can't make tops or bottoms of it all. I like the girl well enough, but I like Sophy, too, and it's no good beating about the bush. I like Sophy, she's the girl I love; but Mary's a fine creature, and money like that wants looking at before you throw it away, love or no love. Three thousand pounds! I'd be a made man.'

And as if in sheer spite to his mother; as if a bushel of money lay on the doorstep for him to kick over whenever the fancy seized him; in short (as Mrs. Witlow very clearly intimated) as if in contempt of Providence, he began to pursue Sophy Daws with a new fervour, and walked with that young girl more than he was accustomed to, more than ever before; in fact, as his mother bemoaned, more than he had need to. It was unreasonable, it was a shame, a foolishness; it wasn't decent and it wasn't safe.

On his weekly visits to the farm his mind still wavered. Mrs Sadgrove let him alone; she was very good she did not pester him with questions and entreaties. There was Mary with her white dress and her red hair and her silence; a girl with a great fortune, walking about the yard, or sitting in the room, and casting not a glance upon him. Not that he would have known it if she did, for now he was just as shy of her. Mrs. Sadgrove often left them alone, but when they were alone he could not dish up a word for the pretty maid; he was dumb as a statue. If either she or her mother had lifted so much as a finger then there would have been an end to his hesitations or suspicions, for in Mary's presence the fine glory of the girl seized him incontinently; he was again

full of a longing to press her lips, to lay down his doubts, to touch her bosom – though he could not think she would ever allow that! Not an atom of doubt about *her* ever visited him; she was unaware of her mother's queer project. Rather, if she became aware he was sure it would be the end of him. Too beautiful she was, too learned, and too rich. Decidedly it was his native cunning, and no want of love, that inhibited him. Folks with property did not often come along and bid you help yourself. Not very often! And throw in a grand bright girl, just for good measure as you might say. Not very often!

For weeks the higgler made his customary calls, and each time the outcome was the same; no more, no less. 'Some dodge,' he mused, 'something the girl don't know and the mother does.' Were they going bankrupt, or were they mortgaged up to the neck, or was there anything the matter with the girl, or was it just the mother wanted to get hold of him? He knew his own value if he didn't know his own mind, and his value couldn't match that girl any more than his mind could. So what *did* they want him for? Whatever it was, Harvey Witlow was ready for it whenever he was in Mary's presence, but once away from her his own craftiness asserted itself: it was a snare, they were trying to make a mock of him!

But nothing could prevent his own mother mocking him, and her treatment of Sophy was so unbearable that if the heart of that dusky beauty had not been proof against all impediments, Harvey might have had to whistle for her favour. But whenever he was with Sophy he had only one heart, undivided and true, and certain as time itself.

'I love Sophy best. It's true enough I love Mary, too, but I love Sophy better. I know it; Sophy's the girl I must wed. It might not be so if I weren't all dashed and doddered about the money; I don't know. But I do know that Mary's innocent of all this craftiness; it's her mother trying to mogue me into it.'

Later he would be wishing he could only forget Sophy and do it. Without the hindrance of conscience he could do it, catch or no catch.

He went on calling at the farm, with nothing said or settled

until October. Then Harvey made up his mind, and without a word to the Sadgroves he went and married Sophy Daws and gave up calling at the farm altogether. This gave him some feeling of dishonesty, some qualm, and a vague unhappiness; likewise he feared the cold hostility of Mrs. Sadgrove. She would be terribly vexed. As for Mary, he was nothing to her, poor girl; it was a shame. The last time he drove that way he did not call at the farm. Autumn was advancing, and the apples were down, the bracken dying, the furze out of bloom, and the farm on the moor looked more and more lonely, and most cold, though it lodged a flame-haired silent woman, fit for a nobleman, whom they wanted to mate with a common higgler. Crafty, you know, too crafty!

5

The marriage was a gay little occasion, but they did not go away for a honeymoon. Sophy's grandmother from a distant village, Cassandra Fundy, who had a deafness and a speckled skin, brought her third husband, Amos, whom the family had never seen before. Not a very wise man, indeed he was a common man, stooping like a decayed tree, he was so old. But he shaved every day and his hairless skull was yellow. Cassandra, who was yellow too, had long since turned into a fool; she did not shave, though she ought to have done. She was like to die soon, but everybody said old Amos would live to be a hundred; it was expected of him, and he, too, was determined.

The guests declared that a storm was threatening, but Amos Fundy denied it and scorned it.

'Thunder p'raps, but 'twill clear; 'tis only de pride o' der morning.'

'Don't you be a fool,' remarked his wife enigmatically, 'you'll die soon enough.'

'You must behold der moon,' continued the octogenarian; 'de closer it is to der wheel, de closer der rain; de furder away it is, de furder der rain.'

'You could pour that man's brains into a thimble,' declared Cassandra of her spouse, 'and they wouldn't fill it – he's deaf.'

Fundy was right; the day did clear. The marriage was made and the guests returned with the man and his bride to their home. But Fundy was also wrong, for storm came soon after and rain set in. The guests stayed on for tea, and then, as it was no better, they feasted and stayed till night. And Harvey began to think they never would go, but of course they couldn't and so there they were. Sophy was looking wonderful in white stockings and shiny shoes and a red frock with a tiny white apron. A big girl she seemed, with her shaken dark hair and flushed face. Grandmother Fundy spoke seriously, but not secretly to her.

'I've had my fourteen touch of children,' said Grandmother Fundy. 'Yes, they were flung on the mercy of God – poor little devils. I've followed most of 'em to the churchyard. You go slow, Sophia.'

'Yes, Granny.'

'Why,' continued Cassandra, embracing the whole company, as it were, with her disclosure, 'my mother had me by some gentleman!'

The announcement aroused no response except sympathetic, and perhaps encouraging, nods from the women.

'She had me by some gentleman – she ought to ha' had a twal' month, she did!'

'Wasn't she ever married?' Sophy inquired of her grandmother.

'Married? Yes, course she was,' replied the old dame, 'of course. But marriage ain't everything. Twice she was, but not to he, she wasn't.'

'Not to the gentleman?'

'No! Oh, no! He'd got money – bushels! Marriage ain't much, not with these gentry.'

'Ho, ho, that's a tidy come-up!' laughed Harvey.

'Who was that gentleman?' Sophia's interest was deeply engaged. But Cassandra Fundy was silent, pondering like a china image. Her gaze was towards the mantelpiece, where there were four lamps – but only one usable – and two clocks – but only one going – and a coloured greeting card a foot long with large letters *KEEP SMILING* adorned with lithographic honeysuckle.

'She's hard of hearing,' interpolated Grandfather Amos, 'very

hard, gets worse. She've a horn at home, big as that . . .' His eyes roved the room for an object of comparison, and he seized upon the fire shovel that lay in the fender. 'Big as that shovel. Crown silver it is, and solid, a beautiful horn, but' – he brandished the shovel before them – 'her won't use 'en.'

'Granny, who was that gentleman?' shouted Sophy. 'Did you know him?'

'No! no!' declared the indignant dame. 'I dunno ever his name, nor I don't want to. He took hisself off to Ameriky, and now he's in the land of heaven. I never seen him. If I had, I'd a given it to him properly; oh, my dear, not blay-guarding him, you know, but just plain language! Where's your seven commandments?'

At last the rain abated. Peeping into the dark garden you could see the fugitive moonlight hung in a million raindrops in the black twigs of all sorts of bushes and trees, while along the cantle of the porch a line of raindrops hung, even and regular, as if they were nailheads made of glass. So all the guests departed, in one long staggering, struggling, giggling and guffawing body, into the village street. The bride and her man stood in the porch, watching, and waving hands. Sophy was momentarily grieving: what a lot of trouble and fuss when you announced that henceforward you were going to sleep with a man because you loved him true! She had said good-bye to her grandmother Cassandra, to her father and her little sister. She had hung on her mother's breast, sighing an almost intolerable farewell to innocence – never treasured until it is gone, and thenceforward a pretty sorrow cherished more deeply than wilder joys.

Into Harvey's mind, as they stood there at last alone, momentarily stole an image of a bright-haired girl, lovely, silent, sad, whom he felt he had deeply wronged. And he was sorry. He had escaped the snare, but if there had been no snare he might this night have been sleeping with a different bride. And it would have been just as well. Sophy looked but a girl with her blown hair and wet face. She was wiping her tears on the tiny apron. But she had the breasts of a woman and decoying eyes.

'Sophy, Sophy!' breathed Harvey, wooing her in the darkness.

'It blows and it rains, and it rains and it blows,' chattered the

crumpled bride, 'and I'm all so bescambled I can't tell wet from windy.'

'Come, my love,' whispered the bridegroom, 'come in, to home.'

6

Four or five months later the higgler's affairs had again taken a rude turn. Marriage, alas, was not all it might be; his wife and his mother quarrelled unendingly. Sometimes he sided with the one and sometimes with the other. He could not yet afford to instal his mother in a separate cottage, and therefore even Sophy had to admit that her mother-in-law had a right to be living there with them, the home being hers. Harvey hadn't bought much of it; and though he was welcome to it all now, and it would be exclusively his as soon as she died, still, it was her furniture, and you couldn't drive any woman (even your mother) off her own property. Sophy, who wanted a home of her own, was vexed and moody, and antagonistic to her man. Business, too, had gone down sadly of late. He had thrown up the Shag Moor round months ago; he could not bring himself to go there again, and he had not been able to square up the loss by any substantial new connections. On top of it all his horse died. It stumbled on a hill one day and fell, and it couldn't get up, or it wouldn't – at any rate, it didn't. Harvey thrashed it and coaxed it, then he cursed it and kicked it; after that he sent for a veterinary man, and the veterinary man ordered it to be shot. And it was shot. A great blow to Harvey Witlow was that. He had no money to buy another horse; money was tight with him, very tight; and so he had to hire at fabulous cost a decrepit nag that ate like a good one. It ate – well, it would have astonished you to see what that creature disposed of, with hay the price it was and corn gone up to heaven nearly. In fact Harvey found that he couldn't stand the racket much longer, and as he could not possibly buy another it looked very much as if he was in queer street once more, unless he could borrow the money from some friendly person. Of course there were plenty of friendly persons, but they had no money, just as there were many persons who had the money but

were not what you might call friendly; and so the higgler began to reiterate twenty times a day, and forty times a day, that he was entirely and absolutely damned and done. Things were thus very bad with him, they were at their worst – for he had a wife to keep now, as well as a mother, and a horse that ate like Satan, and worked like a gnat – when it suddenly came into his mind that Mrs. Sadgrove was reputed to have a lot of money, and had no call to be unfriendly to him. He had his grave doubts about the size of her purse, but there could be no harm in trying so long as you approached her in a right reasonable manner.

For a week or two he held off from this appeal, but the grim spectre of destitution gave him no rest, and so, near the close of a wild March day, he took his desperate courage and his cart and the decrepit nag to Shag Moor. Wild it was, though dry, and the wind against them, a vast turmoil of icy air strident and baffling. The nag threw up its head and declined to trot. Evening was but an hour away, the fury of the wind did not retard it, nor the clouds hasten it. Low down the sun was quitting the wrack of storm, exposing a jolly orb of magnifying fire that shone flush under eaves and through the casements of cottages, casting a pattern of lattice and tossing boughs upon the interior walls, lovelier than dreamed-of pictures. The heads of mothers and old dames were also imaged there, recognizable in their black shadows; and little children held up their hands between window and wall to make five-fingered shapes upon the golden screen. To drive on the moor then was to drive into blasts more dire. Darkness began to fall, and bitter cold it was. No birds to be seen, neither beast nor man; empty of everything it was except sound and a marvel of dying light, and Harvey Witlow of Dinnop with a sour old nag driving from end to end of it. At Prattle Corner dusk was already abroad: there was just one shaft of light that broached a sharp-angled stack in the rickyard, an ark of darkness, along whose top the gads and wooden pins and tilted straws were miraculously fringed in the last glare. Hitching his nag to the palings he knocked at the door, and knew in the gloom that it was Mary who opened it and stood peering forth at him.

'Good evening,' he said, touching his hat.

'Oh!' the girl uttered a cry. 'Higgler! What do you come for?' It was the longest sentence she had ever spoken to him; a sad frightened voice.

'I thought,' he began, 'I'd call – and see Mrs. Sadgrove. I wondered . . .'

'Mother's dead,' said the girl. She drew the door farther back, as if inviting him, and he entered. The door was shut behind him, and they were alone in darkness, together. The girl was deeply grieving. Trembling, he asked the question: 'What is it you tell me, Mary?'

'Mother's dead,' repeated the girl, 'all day, all day, all day.' They were close to each other, but he could not see her. All round the house the wind roved lamentingly, shuddering at doors and windows. 'She died in the night. The doctor was to have come, but he has not come all day,' Mary whispered, 'all day, all day. I don't understand; I have waited for him, and he has not come. She died, she was dead in her bed this morning, and I've been alone all day, all day, and I don't know what is to be done.'

'I'll go for the doctor,' he said hastily, but she took him by the hand and drew him into the kitchen. There was no candle lit; a fire was burning there, richly glowing embers, that laid a gaunt shadow of the table across a corner of the ceiling. Every dish on the dresser gleamed, the stone floor was rosy, and each smooth curve on the dark settle was shining like ice. Without invitation he sat down.

'No,' said the girl, in a tremulous voice, 'you must help me.' She lit a candle: her face was white as the moon, her lips were sharply red, and her eyes were wild. 'Come,' she said, and he followed her behind the settle and up the stairs to a room where there was a disordered bed, and what might be a body lying under the quilt. The higgler stood still staring at the form under the quilt. The girl, too, was still and staring. Wind dashed upon the ivy at the window and hallooed like a grieving multitude. A crumpled gown hid the body's head, but thrust from under it, almost as if to greet him, was her naked lean arm, the palm of the

hand lying uppermost. At the foot of the bed was a large washing-bowl, with sponge and towels.

'You've been laying her out! Yourself!' exclaimed Witlow. The pale girl set down the candle on a chest of drawers. 'Help me now,' she said, and moving to the bed she lifted the crumpled gown from off the face of the dead woman, at the same time smoothing the quilt closely up to the body's chin. 'I cannot put the gown on, because of her arm, it has gone stiff.' She shuddered and stood holding the gown as if offering it to the man. He lifted that dead naked arm and tried to place it down at the body's side, but it resisted and he let go his hold. The arm swung back to its former outstretched position as if it still lived and resented that pressure. The girl retreated from the bed with a timorous cry.

'Get me a bandage,' he said, 'or something we can tear up.'

She gave him some pieces of linen.

'I'll finish this for you,' he brusquely whispered. 'You get along downstairs and take a swig of brandy. Got any brandy?'

She did not move. He put his arm around her and gently urged her to the door.

'Brandy,' he repeated, 'and light your candles.'

He watched her go heavily down the stairs before he shut the door. Returning to the bed he lifted the quilt. The dead body was naked and smelt of soap. Dropping the quilt he lifted the outstretched arm again, like cold wax to the touch and unpliant as a sturdy sapling, and tried once more to bend it to the body's side. As he did so the bedroom door blew open with a crash. It was only a draught of the wind, and a loose latch – Mary had opened a door downstairs, perhaps – but it awed him as if some invisible looker were there resenting his presence. He went and closed the door; the latch had a loose hasp, and tiptoeing nervously back he seized the dreadful arm with a sudden brutal energy, and bent it by thrusting his knee violently into the hollow of the elbow. Hurriedly he slipped the gown over the head and inserted the arm in the sleeve. A strange impulse of modesty stayed him for a moment: should he call the girl and let her complete the robing of the naked body under the quilt? That preposterous pause seemed to add a new anger to the wind, and again the door sprang open.

He delayed no longer, but letting it remain open, he uncovered the dead woman. As he lifted the chill body the long outstretched arm moved and tilted like the boom of a sail, but crushing it to its side he bound the limb fast with the strips of linen. So Mrs. Sadgrove was made ready for her coffin. Drawing the quilt back to her neck, with a gush of relief he glanced about the room. It was a very ordinary bedroom: bed, washstand, chest of drawers, chair, and two pictures – one of deeply religious import, and the other a little pink print, in a gilded frame, of a bouncing nude nymph recumbent upon a cloud. It was queer: a lot of people, people whom you wouldn't think it of, had that sort of picture in their bedrooms.

Mary was now coming up the stairs again, with a glass half full of liquid. She brought it to him.

'No, you drink it,' he urged, and Mary sipped the brandy.

'I've finished – I've finished,' he said as he watched her, 'she's quite comfortable now.'

The girl looked her silent thanks at him, again holding out the glass. 'No, sup it yourself,' he said; but as she stood in the dim light, regarding him with her strange gaze, and still offering the drink, he took it from her, drained it at a gulp and put the glass upon the chest, beside the candle. 'She's quite comfortable now. I'm very grieved, Mary,' he said with awkward kindness, 'about all this trouble that's come on you.'

She was motionless as a wax image, as if she had died in her steps, her hand still extended as when he took the glass from it. So piercing was her gaze that his own drifted from her face and took in again the objects in the room: the washstand, the candle on the chest, the little pink picture. The wind beat upon the ivy outside the window as if a monstrous whip were lashing its slaves.

'You must notify the registrar,' he began again, 'but you must see the doctor first.'

'I've waited for him all day,' Mary whispered, 'all day. The nurse will come again soon. She went home to rest in the night.' She turned towards the bed. 'She has only been ill a week.'

'Yes?' he lamely said. 'Dear me, it is sudden.'

'I must see the doctor,' she continued.

'I'll drive you over to him in my gig.' He was eager to do that.

'I don't know,' said Mary slowly.

'Yes, I'll do that, soon's you're ready. Mary,' he fumbled with his speech, 'I'm not wanting to pry into your affairs, or anything as don't concern me, but how are you going to get along now? Have you got any relations?'

'No,' the girl shook her head. 'No.'

'That's bad. What was you thinking of doing? How has she left you – things were in a baddish way, weren't they?'

'Oh, no,' Mary looked up quickly. 'She has left me very well-off. I shall go on with the farm; there's the old man and the boy – they've gone to a wedding to-day; I shall go on with it. She was so thoughtful for me, and I would not care to leave all this, I love it.'

'But you can't do it by yourself, alone?'

'No. I'm to get a man to superintend, a working bailiff,' she said.

'Oh!' And again they were silent The girl went to the bed and lifted the covering. She saw the bound arm and then drew the quilt tenderly over the dead face. Witlow picked up his hat and found himself staring again at the pink picture. Mary took the candle preparatory to descending the stairs. Suddenly the higgler turned to her and ventured: 'Did you know as she once asked me to marry you?' he blurted.

Her eyes turned from him, but he guessed – he could feel that she *had* known.

'I've often wondered why,' he murmured, 'why she wanted that.'

'She didn't,' said the girl.

That gave pause to the man; he felt stupid at once and roved his fingers in a silly way along the roughened nap of his hat.

'Well, she asked me to,' he bluntly protested.

'She knew,' Mary's voice was no louder than a sigh, 'that you were courting another girl, the one you married.'

'But, but,' stuttered the honest higgler, 'if she knew that why did she want for me to marry you?'

'She didn't,' said Mary again; and again, in the pause, he did

silly things to his hat. How shy this girl was, how lovely in her modesty and grief!

'I can't make tops or bottoms of it,' he said; 'but she asked me, as sure as God's my maker.'

'I know. It was me, I wanted it.'

'You!' he cried, 'you wanted to marry me!'

The girl bowed her head, lovely in her grief and modesty: 'She was against it, but I made her ask you.'

'And I hadn't an idea that you cast a thought on me,' he murmured. 'I feared it was a sort of trick she was playing on me. I didn't understand, I had no idea that you knew about it even. And so I didn't ever ask you.'

'Oh, why not, why not? I was fond of you then,' whispered she. 'Mother tried to persuade me against it, but I was fond of you – then.'

He was in a queer distress and confusion: 'Oh, if you'd only tipped me a word, or given me a sort of look,' he sighed. 'Oh, Mary!'

She said no more, but went downstairs. He followed her and immediately fetched the lamps from his gig. As he lit the candles: 'How strange,' Mary said, 'that you should come back just as I most needed help. I am very grateful.'

'Mary, I'll drive you to the doctor's now.'

She shook her head; she was smiling.

'Then I'll stay till the nurse comes.'

'No, you must go. Go at once.'

He picked up the two lamps, and turning at the door said: 'I'll come again to-morrow.' Then the wind rushed into the room: 'Good-bye,' she cried, shutting the door quickly behind him.

He drove away into deep darkness, the wind howling, his thoughts strange and bitter. He had thrown away a love, a love that was dumb and hid itself. By God, he had thrown away a fortune, too! And he had forgotten all about his real errand until now, forgotten all about the loan! Well, let it go; give it up. He would give up higgling; he would take on some other job; a bailiff, a working bailiff, that was the job that would suit him, a working bailiff. Of course there was Sophy; but still – Sophy!

A Hedonist[1]

BY JOHN GALSWORTHY

RUPERT K. VANESS remains freshly in my mind because he was so fine and large, and because he summed up in his person and behaviour a philosophy which, budding before the war, hibernated during that distressing epoch, and is now again in bloom.

He was a New Yorker addicted to Italy. One often puzzled over the composition of his blood. From his appearance it was rich; and his name fortified the conclusion. What the K. stood for, however, I never learned; the three possibilities were equally intriguing. Had he a strain of Highlander with Kenneth or Keith; a drop of German or Scandinavian with Kurt or Knut; a blend of Syrian or Armenian with Khalil or Kassim? The blue in his fine eyes seemed to preclude the last, but there was an encouraging curve in his nostrils, and a raven gleam in his auburn hair, which by the way was beginning to grizzle and recede when I knew him. The flesh of his face, too, had sometimes a tired and pouchy appearance, and his tall body looked a trifle rebellious within his extremely well-cut clothes – but, after all, he was fifty-five. You felt that Vaness was a philosopher, yet he never bored you with his views, and was content to let you grasp his moving principle gradually, through watching what he ate, drank, smoked, wore, and how he encircled himself with the beautiful things and people of this life. One presumed him rich, for one was never conscious of money in his presence. Life moved round him with a certain noiseless ease or stood still at a perfect temperature, like the air in a conservatory round a choice blossom which a draught might shrivel.

This image of a flower in relation to Rupert K. Vaness pleases me, because of that little incident in Magnolia Garden, near Charleston, South Carolina.

Vaness was the sort of a man of whom one could never say with

[1] From *Caravan*, by John Galsworthy, by permission of Messrs. William Heinemann, Ltd.

safety whether he was revolving round a beautiful young woman or whether the beautiful young woman was revolving round him. His looks, his wealth, his taste, his reputation, invested him with a certain sun-like quality; but his age, the recession of his locks, and the advancement of his waist were beginning to dim his lustre; so that whether he was moth or candle was becoming a moot point. It was moot to me, watching him and Miss Sabine Monroy at Charleston throughout the month of March. The casual observer would have said that she was 'playing him up' as a young poet of my acquaintance puts it; but I was not casual. For me Vaness had the attraction of a theorem, and I was looking rather deeply into him and Miss Monroy. That girl had charm. She came, I think, from Baltimore, with a strain in her, they said, of old Southern Creole blood. Tall and what is known as willowy, with dark chestnut hair, very broad dark eyebrows, very soft quick eyes, and a pretty mouth – when she did not accentuate it with lip-salve – she had more sheer quiet vitality than any girl I ever saw. It was delightful to watch her dance, ride, play tennis. She laughed with her eyes; she talked with a savouring vivacity. She never seemed tired or bored. She was – in one hackneyed word – 'attractive.' And Vaness, the connoisseur, was quite obviously attracted. Of men who professionally admire beauty one can never tell offhand whether they definitely design to add a pretty woman to their collection, or whether their dalliance is just matter of habit. But he stood and sat about her, he drove and rode, listened to music, and played cards with her; he did all but dance with her, and even at times, trembled on the brink of that. And his eyes – those fine lustrous eyes of his – followed her about.

How she had remained unmarried to the age of twenty-six was a mystery, till one reflected that with her power of enjoying life she could not yet have had the time. Her perfect physique was at full stretch for eighteen hours out of the twenty-four each day. Her sleep must have been like that of a baby. One figured her sinking into dreamless rest the moment her head touched pillow, and never stirring till she sprang up into her bath.

As I say, for me, Vaness, or rather his philosophy, *erat demon-*

strandum. I was philosophically in some distress just then. The microbe of fatalism, already present in the brains of artists before the War, had been considerably enlarged by that depressing occurrence. Could a civilization basing itself on the production of material advantages, do anything but ensure the desire for more and more material advantages? Could it promote progress even of a material character except in countries whose resources were still much in excess of their population? The war had seemed to me to show that mankind was too combative an animal ever to recognize that the good of all was the good of one. The coarse-fibred, pugnacious, and self-seeking would, I had become sure, always carry too many guns for the refined and kindly. In short, there was not enough altruism to go round – not half, not a hundredth part enough. The simple heroism of mankind, disclosed or rather accentuated by the War, seemed to afford no hope – it was so exploitable by the rhinoceri and tigers of high life. The march of science appeared on the whole to be carrying us backward. I deeply suspected that there had been ages when the populations of this earth, though less numerous and comfortable, had been proportionately more healthy than they were at present. As for religion, I had never had the least faith in Providence rewarding the pitiable by giving them a future life of bliss; the theory seemed to me illogical, for even more pitiable in this life appeared to me the thick-skinned and successful, and these, as we know, in the saying about the camel and the needle's eye, our religion consigns wholesale to hell. Success, power, wealth – those aims of profiteers and premiers, pedagogues and pandemoniacs, of all, in fact, who could not see God in a dewdrop, hear Him in distant goat-bells, and scent Him in a pepper tree – had always appeared to me akin to dry rot. And yet every day one saw more distinctly that they were the pea in the thimble-rig of life, the hub of a universe which, to the approbation of the majority they represented, they were fast making uninhabitable. It did not even seem of any use to help one's neighbours; all efforts at relief just gilded the pill and encouraged our stubbornly contentious leaders to plunge us all into fresh miseries. So I was searching right and left for something to believe in, willing to accept

even Rupert K. Vaness and his basking philosophy. But could a man bask his life right out? Could just looking at fine pictures, tasting rare fruits and wines, the mere listening to good music, the scent of azaleas and the best tobacco, above all the society of pretty women, keep salt in my bread, an ideal in my brain? Could they? That's what I wanted to know.

Everyone who goes to Charleston in the spring, soon or late, visits Magnolia Garden. A painter of flowers and trees, myself, I specialize in gardens, and freely assert that none in the world is so beautiful as this. Even before the magnolias came out, it consigns the Boboli at Florence, the Cinnamon Gardens of Colombo, Concepcion at Malaga, Versailles, Hampton Court, the Generaliffe at Granada, and La Mortola to the category of 'also ran.' Nothing so free, gracious, so lovely and wistful, nothing so richly coloured, yet so ghostlike, exists, planted by the sons of men. It is a kind of paradise which has wandered down a miraculously enchanted wilderness. Brilliant with azaleas, or magnolia-pale, it centres round a pool of water, overhung by tall trunks festooned with the grey Florida moss. Beyond anything I have ever seen, it is other-worldly. And I went there day after day, drawn as one is drawn in youth by visions of the Ionian Sea, of the East, or the Pacific Isles. I used to sit paralysed by the absurdity of putting brush to canvas, in front of that dream-pool. I wanted to paint of it a picture like that of the fountain, by Helleu, which hangs in the Luxembourg. But I knew I never should.

I was sitting there one sunny afternoon with my back to a clump of azaleas, watching an old coloured gardener – so old that he had started life as an 'owned' negro, they said, and certainly still retained the familiar suavity of the old-time darkie – I was watching him prune the shrubs when I heard the voice of Rupert K. Vaness say, quite close:

'There's nothing for me but beauty, Miss Monroy.'

The two were evidently just behind my azalea clump, perhaps four yards away, yet as invisible as if in China.

'Beauty is a wide, wide word. Define it, Mr. Vaness.'

'An ounce of fact is worth a ton of theory – it stands before me.'

'Come now, that's just a get-out. Is beauty of the flesh or of the spirit?'

'What is the spirit, as you call it? I'm a pagan.'

'Oh! so am I. But the Greeks were pagans.'

'Well, spirit is only the refined side of sensual appreciations.'

'I wonder!'

'I have spent my life in finding that out.'

'Then the feeling this garden rouses in me is purely sensuous?'

'Of course. If you were standing there blind and deaf, without the powers of scent and touch, where would your feeling be?'

'You are very discouraging, Mr. Vaness.'

'No, madam – I face facts. When I was a youngster I had plenty of fluffy aspiration towards I didn't know what – I even used to write poetry.'

'Oh! Mr. Vaness, was it good?'

'It was not. I very soon learned that a genuine sensation was worth all the uplift in the world.'

'What is going to happen when your senses strike work?'

'I shall sit in the sun and fade out.'

'I certainly do like your frankness.'

'You think me a cynic, of course; I am nothing so futile, Miss Sabine. A cynic is just a posing ass proud of his attitude. I see nothing to be proud of in my attitude, just as I see nothing to be proud of in the truths of existence.'

'Suppose you had been poor?'

'My senses would be lasting better than they are; and when they at last failed, I should die quicker, from want of food and warmth – that's all.'

'Have you been in love, Mr. Vaness?'

'I am in love now.'

'And your love has no element of devotion, no finer side?'

'None. It wants.'

'I have never been in love. But, if I were, I think I should want to lose myself, rather than to gain the other.'

'Would you? Sabine, *I am in love with you.*'

'Oh! Shall we walk on?'

I heard their footsteps, and was alone again, with the old gardener lopping at his shrubs.

But what a perfect declaration of hedonism! How simple and how solid was this Vaness theory of existence! Almost Assyrian – worthy of Louis Quinze!

And just then the old negro came up.

'It's pleasant settin',' he said in his polite and hoarse half-whisper; 'dar ain't no flies yet.'

'It's perfect, Richard. This is the most beautiful spot in the world.'

'Sure,' he answered, softly drawling. 'In de war time de Yanks nearly burn d'house heah. Sherman's Yanks. Sure dey did, po'ful angry wi' ole Massa dey was, 'cos he hid up d' silver plate afore he went away. My ole father was de factotalum den. De Yanks took'm, Suh; dey took'm; and de Major he tell my fader to show'm whar de plate was. My ole fader he look at'm an' say: "Wot yuh take me foh? Yuh take me for a sneakin' nigger? No, Suh, yuh can do wot yuh like wid dis chile, he ain't goin' to act no Judas. No, Suh!" And de Yankee Major he put'm up against dat tall live oak dar, an' he say: "Yu darn ungrateful nigger. I'se come all dis way to set yuh free. Now, whar's dat silver plate, or I shoot yuh up, sure!" "No, Suh," says my fader, "shoot away. I'se never goin' t' tell." So dey begin to shoot, and shot all roun'm to skeer'm up. I was a lil' boy den, an' I see my ole fader wid my own eyes, Suh, standin' thar's bold's Peter. No, Suh, dey didn't never got no word from him; he loved de folk heah; sure he did.'

The old man smiled; and in that beatific smile I saw not only his perennial pleasure in the well-known story, but the fact that he too would have stood there with the bullets raining round him, sooner than betray the folk he loved.

'Fine story, Richard; but – very silly obstinate old man, your father, wasn't he?'

He looked at me with a sort of startled anger, which slowly broadened into a grin; then broke into soft hoarse laughter.

'Oh! yes, suh, sure! Berry silly obstinacious ole man. Yes, suh, indeed.' And he went off cackling to himself.

He had only just gone when I heard footsteps again behind my azalea clump, and Miss Monroy's voice:

'Your philosophy is that of faun and nymph. But can you play the part?'

'Only let me try.' Those words had such a fevered ring that in imagination I could see Vaness all flushed, his fine eyes shining, his well-kept hands trembling, his lips a little protruded.

There came a laugh, high, gay, sweet.

'Very well, then; catch me!' I heard a swish of skirt against the shrubs, the sound of flight; an astonished gasp from Vaness and the heavy thud, thud of his feet following on the path through the azalea maze. I hoped fervently that they would not suddenly come running past and see me sitting there. My straining ears caught another laugh far off, a panting sound, a muttered oath, a far-away Cooee. And then, staggering, winded, pale with heat and with vexation, Vaness appeared, caught sight of me, and stood a moment – baff! Sweat was running down his face, his hand was clutching at his side, his stomach heaved – a hunter beaten and undignified. He muttered, turned abruptly on his heel, and left me staring at where his fastidious dandyism and all that it stood for had so abruptly come undone.

I know not how he and Miss Monroy got home to Charleston; not in the same car, I guess. As for me, I travelled deep in thought, conscious of having witnessed something rather tragic, not looking forward to my next encounter with Vaness.

He was not at dinner, but the girl was there; radiant as ever; and though I was glad she had not been caught I was almost angry at the signal triumph of her youth. She wore a black dress with a red flower in her hair, and another at her breast, and had never looked so vital and so pretty. Instead of dallying with my cigar beside cool waters in the lounge of the hotel, I strolled out afterwards on the Battery, and sat down beside the statue of a tutelary personage. A lovely evening: from some tree or shrub close by emerged an adorable faint fragrance, and in the white electric light the acacia foliage was patterned out against a thrilling blue sky. If there were no fireflies abroad, there should have been. A night for hedonists, indeed!

And, suddenly, in fancy, there came before me Vaness's well-dressed person, panting, pale, perplexed; and beside him, by a freak of vision, stood the old darky's father, bound to the live oak, with the bullets whistling past, and his face transfigured. There they stood alongside – the creed of pleasure, which depended for fulfilment on its waist measurement; and the creed of love devoted unto death!

'Aha!' I thought; 'which of the two laughs *last*?'

And just then I saw Vaness himself beneath a lamp; cigar in mouth, and cape flung back so that its silk lining shone. Pale and heavy, in the cruel white light, his face had a bitter look. And I was sorry – very sorry, at that moment, for Rupert K. Vaness.

Half-Holiday[1]

BY ALDOUS HUXLEY

It was Saturday afternoon and fine. In the hazy spring sunlight London was beautiful, like a city of the imagination. The lights were golden, the shadows blue and violet. Incorrigibly hopeful, the sooty trees in the Park were breaking into leaf; and the new green was unbelievably fresh and light and aerial, as though the tiny leaves had been cut out of the central emerald stripe of a rainbow. The miracle, to all who walked in the Park that afternoon, was manifest. What had been dead now lived; soot was budding into rainbow green. Yes, it was manifest. And, moreover, those who perceived this thaumaturgical change from death to life were themselves changed. There was something contagious about the vernal miracle. Loving more, the loitering couples under the trees were happier – or much more acutely miserable. Stout men took off their hats, and while the sun kissed their bald heads, made good resolutions – about whisky, about the pretty typist at the office, about early rising. Accosted by spring-intoxicated boys, young girls consented, in the teeth of all their upbringing and their alarm, to go for walks. Middle-aged gentlemen, strolling homewards through the Park, suddenly felt their crusted, business-grimy hearts burgeoning, like these trees, with kindness and generosity. They thought of their wives, thought of them with a sudden gush of affection, in spite of twenty years of marriage. 'Must stop on the way back,' they said to themselves, 'and buy the missus a little present.' What should it be? A box of candied fruits? She liked candied fruits. Or a pot of azaleas? Or . . . And then they remembered that it was Saturday afternoon. The shops would all be shut. And probably, they thought, sighing, the missus's heart would also be shut; for the missus had not walked under the budding trees. Such is life, they reflected, looking sadly at the boats on the glittering Serpentine, at the playing children, at the lovers sitting, hand in hand, on the green

[1] From *Two or Three Graces*, by Aldous Huxley, by permission of Messrs. Chatto and Windus.

grass. Such is life; when the heart is open, the shops are generally shut. But they resolved nevertheless to try, in future, to control their tempers.

On Peter Brett, as on every one else who came within their range of influence, this bright spring sunlight and the new-budded trees profoundly worked. They made him feel, all at once, more lonely, more heartbroken than he had ever felt before. By contrast with the brightness around him, his soul seemed darker. The trees had broken into leaf; but he remained dead. The lovers walked in couples; he walked alone. In spite of the spring, in spite of the sunshine, in spite of the fact that to-day was Saturday and that to-morrow would be Sunday – or rather because of all these things which should have made him happy and which did make other people happy – he loitered through the miracle of Hyde Park feeling deeply miserable.

As usual, he turned for comfort to his imagination. For example, a lovely young creature would slip on a loose stone just in front of him and twist her ankle. Grown larger than life and handsomer, Peter would rush forward to administer first aid. He would take her in a taxi (for which he had money to pay) to her home – in Grosvenor Square. She turned out to be a peer's daughter. They loved each other. . . .

Or else he rescued a child that had fallen into the Round Pond and so earned the eternal gratitude, and more than the gratitude, of its rich young widowed mother. Yes, widowed; Peter always definitely specified her widowhood. His intentions were strictly honourable. He was still very young and had been well brought up.

Or else there was no preliminary accident. He just saw a young girl sitting on a bench by herself, looking very lonely and sad. Boldly, yet courteously, he approached, he took off his hat, he smiled. 'I can see that you're lonely,' he said; and he spoke elegantly and with ease, without a trace of his Lancashire accent, without so much as a hint of that dreadful stammer which, in real life, made speech such a torment to him. 'I can see that you're lonely. So am I. May I sit down beside you?' She smiled, and he sat down. And then he told her that he was an orphan

and that all he had was a married sister who lived in Rochdale. And she said, 'I'm an orphan too.' And that was a great bond between them. And they told one another how miserable they were. And she began to cry. And then he said, 'Don't cry. You've got me.' And at that she cheered up a little. And then they went to the pictures together. And finally, he supposed, they got married. But that part of the story was a little dim.

But of course, as a matter of fact, no accidents ever did happen and he never had the courage to tell any one how lonely he was; and his stammer was something awful; and he was small, he wore spectacles and nearly always had pimples on his face; and his dark grey suit was growing very shabby and rather short in the sleeves; and his boots, though carefully blacked, looked just as cheap as they really were.

It was the boots which killed his imaginings this afternoon. Walking with downcast eyes, pensively, he was trying to decide what he should say to the peer's lovely young daughter in the taxi on the way to Grosvenor Square, when he suddenly became aware of his alternately striding boots, blackly obtruding themselves through the transparent phantoms of his inner life. How ugly they were! And how sadly unlike those elegant and sumptuously shining boots which encase the feet of the rich! They had been ugly enough when they were new; age had rendered them positively repulsive. No boot-trees had corrected the effects of walking, and the uppers, just above the toe-caps, were deeply and hideously wrinkled. Through the polish he could see a network of innumerable little cracks in the parched and shoddy leather. On the outer side of the left boot the toe-cap had come unstitched and had been coarsely sewn up again; the scar was only too visible. Worn by much lacing and unlacing, the eyeholes had lost their black enamel and revealed themselves obtrusively in their brassy nakedness.

Oh, they were horrible, his boots; they were disgusting! But they'd have to last him a long time yet. Peter began to re-make the calculations he had so often and often made before. If he spent three-halfpence less every day on his lunch; if, during the fine weather, he were to walk to the office every morning instead

of taking the 'bus. . . . But, however carefully and however often he made his calculations, twenty-seven and sixpence a week always remained twenty-seven and six. Boots were dear; and when he had saved up enough to buy a new pair, there was still the question of his suit. And, to make matters worse, it was spring; the leaves were coming out, the sun shone, and among the amorous couples he walked alone. Reality was too much for him to-day; he could not escape. The boots pursued him, whenever he tried to flee, and dragged him back to the contemplation of his misery.

II

The two young women turned out of the crowded walk along the edge of the Serpentine, and struck uphill by a smaller path in the direction of Watts's statue. Peter followed them. An exquisite perfume lingered in the air behind them. He breathed it greedily, and his heart began to beat with unaccustomed violence. They seemed to him marvellous and hardly human beings. They were all that was lovely and unattainable. He had met them walking down there, by the Serpentine, had been overwhelmed by that glimpse of a luxurious and arrogant beauty, had turned immediately and followed them. Why? He hardly knew himself. Merely in order that he might be near them; and perhaps with the fantastic, irrepressible hope that something might happen, some miracle, that should project him into their lives.

Greedily he sniffed their delicate perfume; with a kind of desperation, as though his life depended on it, he looked at them, he studied them. Both were tall. One of them wore a grey cloth coat, trimmed with dark grey fur. The other's coat was all of fur; a dozen or two of ruddily golden foxes had been killed in order that she might be warm among the chilly shadows of this spring afternoon. One of them wore grey and the other buff-coloured stockings. One walked on grey kid, the other on serpent's leather. Their hats were small and close-fitting. A small black French bulldog accompanied them, running now at their heels, now in front of them. The dog's collar was trimmed with brindled wolf's fur that stuck out like a ruff round its black head.

Peter walked so close behind them that, when they were out of the crowd, he could hear snatches of their talk. One had a cooing voice; the other spoke rather huskily.

'Such a divine man,' the husky voice was saying, 'such a really divine man!'

'So Elizabeth told me,' said the cooing one.

'Such a perfect party, too,' Husky went on. 'He kept us laughing the whole evening. Everybody got rather buffy, too. When it was time to go, I said I'd walk and trust to luck to find a taxi on the way. Whereupon he invited me to come and look for a taxi in his heart. He said there were so many there, and all of them disengaged.'

They both laughed. The clatter of a party of children who had come up from behind and were passing at this moment prevented Peter from hearing what was said next. Inwardly he cursed the children. Beastly little devils – they were making him lose his revelation. And what a revelation! Of how strange, unfamiliar and gaudy a life! Peter's dreams had always been idyllic and pastoral. Even with the peer's daughter he meant to live in the country, quietly and domestically. The world in which there are perfect parties where everybody gets rather buffy and divine men invite young goddesses to look for taxis in their hearts was utterly unknown to him. He had had a glimpse of it now; it fascinated him by its exotic and tropical strangeness. His whole ambition was now to enter this gorgeous world, to involve himself, somehow and at all costs, in the lives of these young goddesses. Suppose, now, they were both simultaneously to trip over that projecting root and twist their ankles. Suppose . . . But they both stepped over it in safety. And then, all at once, he saw a hope – in the bulldog.

The dog had left the path to sniff at the base of an elm tree growing a few yards away on the right. It had sniffed, it had growled, it had left a challenging souvenir of its visit and was now indignantly kicking up earth and twigs with its hinder paws against the tree, when a yellow Irish terrier trotted up and began in its turn to sniff, first at the trees, then at the bulldog. The bulldog stopped its scrabbling in the dirt and sniffed at the terrier.

Cautiously, the two beasts walked round one another, sniffing and growling as they went. Peter watched them for a moment with a vague and languid curiosity. His mind was elsewhere; he hardly saw the two dogs. Then, in an illuminating flash, it occurred to him that they might begin to fight. If they fought, he was a made man. He would rush in and separate them, heroically. He might even be bitten. But that didn't matter. Indeed, it would be all the better. A bite would be another claim on the goddesses' gratitude. Ardently, he hoped that the dogs would fight. The awful thing would be if the goddesses or the owners of the yellow terrier were to notice and interfere before the fight could begin. 'Oh, God,' he fervently prayed, 'don't let them call the dogs away from each other now. But let the dogs fight. For Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.' Peter had been piously brought up.

The children had passed. The voices of the goddesses once more became audible.

'. . . Such a fearful bore,' the cooing one was saying. 'I can never move a step without finding him there. And nothing penetrates his hide. I've told him that I hate Jews, that I think he's ugly and stupid and tactless and impertinent and boring. But it doesn't seem to make the slightest difference.'

'You should make him useful, at any rate,' said Husky.

'Oh, I do,' affirmed Coo.

'Well, that's something.'

'Something,' Coo admitted. 'But not much.'

There was a pause. 'Oh, God,' prayed Peter, 'don't let them see.'

'If only,' began Coo meditatively, 'if only men would understand that . . .' A fearful noise of growling and barking violently interrupted her. The two young women turned in the direction from which the sound came.

'Pongo!' they shouted in chorus, anxiously and commandingly. And again, more urgently, 'Pongo!'

But their cries were unavailing. Pongo and the yellow terrier were already fighting too furiously to pay any attention.

'Pongo! Pongo!'

And, 'Benny!' the little girl and her stout nurse to whom the yellow terrier belonged as unavailingly shouted. 'Benny, come here!'

The moment had come, the passionately anticipated, the richly pregnant moment. Exultantly, Peter threw himself on the dogs.

'Get away, you brute,' he shouted, kicking the Irish terrier. For the terrier was the enemy, the French bulldog – *their* French bulldog – the friend whom he had come, like one of the Olympian gods in the *Iliad*, to assist. 'Get away!' In his excitement, he forgot that he had a stammer. The letter G was always a difficult one for him; but he managed on this occasion to shout 'Get away' without a trace of hesitation. He grabbed at the dogs by their stumpy tails, by the scruffs of their necks, and tried to drag them apart. From time to time he kicked the yellow terrier. But it was the bulldog which bit him. Stupider even than Ajax, the bulldog had failed to understand that the immortal was fighting on his side. But Peter felt no resentment, and, in the heat of the moment, hardly any pain. The blood came oozing out of a row of jagged holes in his left hand.

'Ooh!' cried Coo, as though it were her hand that had been bitten.

'Be careful,' anxiously admonished Husky. 'Be careful.'

The sound of their voices nerved him to further efforts. He kicked and he tugged still harder; and at last, for a fraction of a second, he managed to part the angry beasts. For a fraction of a second neither dog had any portion of the other's anatomy in his mouth. Peter seized the opportunity, and catching the French bulldog by the loose skin at the back of his neck, he lifted him, still furiously snapping, growling and struggling, into the air. The yellow terrier stood in front of him, barking and every now and then leaping up in a frantic effort to snap the dangling black paws of his enemy. But Peter, with the gesture of Perseus raising on high the severed head of the Gorgon, lifted the writhing Pongo out of danger to the highest stretch of his arm. The yellow dog he kept off with his foot; and the nurse and the little girl, who had by this time somewhat recovered their presence of mind, approached the furious animal from behind and succeeded at last

in hooking the leash to his collar. His four rigidly planted paws skidding over the grass, the yellow terrier was dragged away by main force, still barking, though feebly – for he was being half strangled by his efforts to escape. Suspended six feet above the ground by the leathery black scruff of his neck, Pongo vainly writhed.

Peter turned and approached the goddesses. Husky had narrow eyes and a sad mouth; it was a thin, tragic-looking face. Coo was rounder, pinker and whiter, bluer eyed. Peter looked from one to the other and could not decide which was the more beautiful.

He lowered the writhing Pongo. 'Here's your dog,' was what he wanted to say. But the loveliness of these radiant creatures suddenly brought back all his self-consciousness and with his self-consciousness his stammer. 'Here's your . . .' he began; but could not bring out the dog. D, for Peter, was always a difficult letter.

For all common words beginning with a difficult letter Peter had a number of easier synonyms in readiness. Thus, he always called cats 'pussies,' not out of any affectation of childishness, but because p was more pronounceable than the impossible c. Coal he had to render in the vaguer form of 'fuel.' Dirt, with him, was always 'muck.' In the discovery of synonyms he had become almost as ingenious as those Anglo-Saxon poets who, using alliteration instead of rhyme, were compelled, in their efforts to make (shall we say) the sea begin with the same letter as its waves or its billows, to call it the 'whale-road' or the 'bath of the swans.' But Peter, who could not permit himself the full poetic licence of his Saxon ancestors, was reduced sometimes to spelling the most difficult words to which there happened to be no convenient and prosaic equivalent. Thus, he was never quite sure whether he should call a cup a mug or a c, u, p. And since 'ovum' seemed to be the only synonym for egg, he was always reduced to talking of e, g, g's.

At the present moment, it was the miserable little word 'dog' that was holding him up. Peter had several synonyms for dog. P being a slightly easier letter than d, he could, when not too nervous, say 'pup.' Or if the p's weren't coming easily, he could call the animal, rather facetiously and mock-heroically, a 'hound.'

But the presence of the two goddesses was so unnerving, that Peter found it as hopelessly impossible to pronounce a p or an h as a d. He hesitated painfully, trying to bring out in turn, first dog, then pup, then hound. His face became very red. He was in an agony.

'Here's your whelp,' he managed to say at last. The word, he was conscious, was a little too Shakespearean for ordinary conversation. But it was the only one which came.

'Thank you most awfully,' said Coo.

'You were splendid, really splendid,' said Husky. 'But I'm afraid you're hurt.'

'Oh, it's n-nothing,' Peter declared. And twisting his handkerchief round the bitten hand, he thrust it into his pocket.

Coo, meanwhile, had fastened the end of her leash to Pongo's collar. 'You can put him down now,' she said.

Peter did as he was told. The little black dog immediately bounded forward in the direction of his reluctantly retreating enemy. He came to the end of his tether with a jerk that brought him up on to his hind legs and kept him, barking, in the position of a rampant lion on a coat-of-arms.

'But are you sure it's nothing?' Husky insisted. 'Let me look at it.'

Obediently, Peter pulled off the handkerchief and held out his hand. It seemed to him that all was happening as he had hoped. Then he noticed with horror that the nails were dirty. If only, if only he had thought of washing before he went out! What would they think of him? Blushing, he tried to withdraw his hand. But Husky held it.

'Wait,' she said. And then added: 'It's a nasty bite.'

'Horrid,' affirmed Coo, who had also bent over it. 'I'm so awfully sorry that my stupid dog should have . . .'

'You ought to go straight to a chemist,' said Husky, interrupting her, 'and get him to disinfect it and tie it up.'

She lifted her eyes from his hand and looked into his face.

'A chemist,' echoed Coo, and also looked up.

Peter looked from one to the other, dazzled equally by the wide-open blue eyes and the narrowed, secret eyes of green. He smiled at them vaguely, and vaguely shook his head. Unobtrusively he

wrapped up his hand in his handkerchief and thrust it away, out of sight.

'It's n-nothing,' he said.

'But you must,' insisted Husky.

'You must,' cried Coo.

'N-nothing,' he repeated. He didn't want to go to a chemist. He wanted to stay with the goddesses.

Coo turned to Husky. 'Qu'est-ce qu'on donne à ce petit bonhomme?' she asked, speaking very quickly and in a low voice.

Husky shrugged her shoulders and made a little grimace suggestive of uncertainty. 'Il serait offensé, peut-être,' she suggested.

'Tu crois?'

Husky stole a rapid glance at the subject of their discussion, taking him in critically from his cheap felt hat to his cheap boots, from his pale spotty face to his rather dirty hands, from his steel-framed spectacles to his leather watch-guard. Peter saw that she was looking at him and smiled at her with shy, vague rapture. How beautiful she was! He wondered what they had been whispering about together. Perhaps they were debating whether they should ask him to tea. And no sooner had the idea occurred to him than he was sure of it. Miraculously, things were happening just as they happened in his dreams. He wondered if he would have the face to tell them – this first time – that they could look for taxis in his heart.

Husky turned back to her companion. Once more she shrugged her shoulders. 'Vraiment, je ne sais pas,' she whispered.

'Si on lui donnait une livre?' suggested Coo.

Husky nodded. 'Comme tu voudras.' And while the other turned away to fumble unobtrusively in her purse, she addressed herself to Peter.

'You were awfully brave,' she said, smiling.

Peter could only shake his head, blush and lower his eyes from before that steady, self-assured, cool gaze. He longed to look at her; but when it came to the point, he simply could not keep his eyes steadily fixed on those unwavering eyes of hers.

'Perhaps you're used to dogs,' she went on. 'Have you got one of your own?'

'N-no,' Peter managed to say.

'Ah, well, that makes it all the braver,' said Husky. Then, noticing that Coo had found the money she had been looking for, she took the boy's hand and shook it, heartily. 'Well, good-bye,' she said, smiling more exquisitely than ever. 'We're so awfully grateful to you. Most awfully,' she repeated. And as she did so, she wondered why she used that word 'awfully' so often. Ordinarily she hardly ever used it. It had seemed suitable somehow, when she was talking with this creature. She was always very hearty and emphatic and schoolboyishly slangy when she was with the lower classes.

'G-g-g . . .' began Peter. Could they be going, he wondered in an agony, suddenly waking out of his comfortable and rosy dream. Really going, without asking him to tea or giving him their addresses? He wanted to implore them to stop a little longer, to let him see them again. But he knew that he wouldn't be able to utter the necessary words. In the face of Husky's good-bye he felt like a man who sees some fearful catastrophe impending and can do nothing to arrest it. 'G-g . . .' he feebly stuttered. But he found himself shaking hands with the other one before he had got to the end of that fatal good-bye.

'You were really splendid,' said Coo, as she shook his hand. 'Really splendid. And you simply must go to a chemist and have the bite disinfected at once. Good-bye, and thank you very, very much.' As she spoke these last words she slipped a neatly folded one-pound note into his palm and with her two hands shut his fingers over it. 'Thank you *so* much,' she repeated.

Violently blushing, Peter shook his head. 'N-n . . .' he began, and tried to make her take the note back.

But she only smiled more sweetly. 'Yes, yes,' she insisted. 'Please.' And without waiting to hear any more, she turned and ran lightly after Husky, who had walked on, up the path, leading the reluctant Pongo, who still barked and strained heraldically at his leash.

'Well, that's all right,' she said, as she came up with her companion.

'He accepted it?' asked Husky.

'Yes, yes.' She nodded. Then changing her tone, 'Let me see,' she went on, 'what were we saying when this wretched dog interrupted us?'

'N-no,' Peter managed to say at last. But she had already turned and was hurrying away. He took a couple of strides in pursuit; then checked himself. It was no good. It would only lead to further humiliation if he tried to explain. Why, they might even think, while he was standing there, straining to bring out his words, that he had run after them to ask for more. They might slip another pound into his hand and hurry away still faster. He watched them till they were out of sight, over the brow of the hill; then turned back towards the Serpentine.

In his imagination he re-acted the scene, not as it had really happened, but as it ought to have happened. When Coo slipped the note into his hand he smiled and courteously returned it, saying: 'I'm afraid you've made a mistake. A quite justifiable mistake, I admit. For I look poor, and indeed I am poor. But I am a gentleman, you know. My father was a doctor in Rochdale. My mother was a doctor's daughter. I went to a good school till my people died. They died when I was sixteen, within a few months of one another. So I had to go to work before I'd finished my schooling. But you see that I can't take your money.' And then, becoming more gallant, personal and confidential, he went on: 'I separated those beastly dogs because I wanted to do something for you and your friend. Because I thought you so beautiful and wonderful. So that even if I weren't a gentleman, I wouldn't take your money.' Coo was deeply touched by this little speech. She shook him by the hand and told him how sorry she was. And he put her at her ease by assuring her that her mistake had been perfectly comprehensible. And then she asked if he'd care to come along with them and take a cup of tea. And from this point onwards Peter's imaginings became vaguer and rosier, till he was dreaming the old familiar dream of the peer's daughter, the grateful widow and the lonely orphan; only there happened to be two goddesses this time, and their faces, instead of being dim creations of fancy, were real and definite.

But he knew, even in the midst of his dreaming, that things

hadn't happened like this. He knew that she had gone before he could say anything; and that even if he had run after them and tried to make his speech of explanation, he could never have done it. For example, he would have had to say that his father was a 'medico,' not a doctor (m being an easier letter than d). And when it came to telling them that his people had died, he would have had to say that they had 'perished' – which would sound facetious, as though he were trying to make a joke of it. No, no, the truth must be faced. He had taken the money and they had gone away thinking that he was just some sort of a street loafer, who had risked a bite for the sake of a good tip. They hadn't even dreamed of treating him as an equal. As for asking him to tea and making him their friend. . . .

But his fancy was still busy. It struck him that it had been quite unnecessary to make any explanation. He might simply have forced the note back into her hand, without saying a word. Why hadn't he done it? He had to excuse himself for his remissness. She had slipped away too quickly; that was the reason.

Or what if he had walked on ahead of them and ostentatiously given the money to the first street-boy he happened to meet? A good idea, that. Unfortunately it had not occurred to him at the time.

All that afternoon Peter walked and walked, thinking of what had happened, imagining creditable and satisfying alternatives. But all the time he knew that these alternatives were only fanciful. Sometimes the recollection of his humiliation was so vivid that it made him physically wince and shudder.

The light began to fail. In the grey and violet twilight the lovers pressed closer together as they walked, more frankly clasped one another beneath the trees. Strings of yellow lamps blossomed in the increasing darkness. High up in the pale sky overhead, a quarter of the moon made itself visible. He felt unhappier and lonelier than ever.

His bitten hand was by this time extremely painful. He left the Park and walked along Oxford Street till he found a chemist. When his hand had been disinfected and bandaged he went into a tea-shop and ordered a poached e, g, g, a roll, and a mug

of mocha, which he had to translate for the benefit of the uncomprehending waitress as a c, u, p of c, o, f, f, e, e.

'You seem to think I'm a loafer or a tout.' That's what he ought to have said to her, indignantly and proudly. 'You've insulted me. If you were a man, I'd knock you down. Take your dirty money.' But then, he reflected, he could hardly have expected them to become his friends, after that. On second thoughts, he decided that indignation would have been no good.

'Hurt your hand?' asked the waitress sympathetically, as she set down his egg and his mug of mocha.

Peter nodded. 'B-bitten by a d-d . . . by a h-h-hound.' The word burst out at last, explosively.

Remembered shame made him blush as he spoke. Yes, they had taken him for a tout, they had treated him as though he didn't really exist, as though he were just an instrument whose services you hired and to which, when the bill had been paid, you gave no further thought. The remembrance of humiliation was so vivid, the realization of it so profound and complete, that it affected not only his mind but his body, too. His heart beat with unusual rapidity and violence; he felt sick. It was with the greatest difficulty that he managed to eat his egg and drink his mug of mocha.

Still remembering the painful reality, still feverishly constructing his fanciful alternatives to it, Peter left the tea-shop and, though he was very tired, resumed his aimless walking. He walked along Oxford Street as far as the Circus, turned down Regent Street, halted in Piccadilly to look at the epileptically twitching sky-signs, walked up Shaftesbury Avenue, and turning southwards made his way through by-streets towards the Strand.

In a street near Covent Garden a woman brushed against him. 'Cheer up, dearie,' she said, 'Don't look so glum.'

Peter looked at her in astonishment. Was it possible that she should have been speaking to him? A woman – was it possible? He knew, of course, that she was what people called a bad woman. But the fact that she should have spoken to him seemed none the less extraordinary; and he did not connect it, somehow, with her 'badness.'

'Come along with me,' she wheedled.

Peter nodded. He could not believe it was true. She took his arm.

'You got money?' she asked anxiously.

He nodded again.

'You look as though you'd been to a funeral,' said the woman.

'I'm l-lonely,' he explained. He felt ready to weep. He even longed to weep – to weep and to be comforted. His voice trembled as he spoke.

'Lonely? That's funny. A nice-looking boy like you's got no call to be lonely.' She laughed significantly and without mirth.

Her bedroom was dimly and pinkly lighted. A smell of cheap scent and unwashed underlinen haunted the air.

'Wait a tick,' she said, and disappeared through a door into an inner room.

He sat there, waiting. A minute later she returned, wearing a kimono and bedroom slippers. She sat on his knees, threw her arms round his neck and began to kiss him. 'Lovey,' she said in her cracked voice, 'lovey.' Her eyes were hard and cold. Her breath smelt of spirits. Seen at close range she was indescribably horrible.

Peter saw her, it seemed to him, for the first time – saw and completely realized her. He averted his face. Remembering the peer's daughter who had sprained her ankle, the lonely orphan, the widow whose child had tumbled into the Round Pond; remembering Coo and Husky, he untwined her arms, he pushed her away from him, he sprang to his feet.

'S-sorry,' he said. 'I must g-g . . . I'd forg-gotten something. I . . .' He picked up his hat and moved towards the door.

The woman ran after him and caught him by the arm. 'You young devil, you,' she screamed. Her abuse was horrible and filthy. 'Asking a girl and then trying to sneak away without paying. Oh, no, you don't, no, you don't. You . . .'

And the abuse began again.

Peter dipped his hand into his pocket, and pulled out Coo's neatly folded note. 'L-let me g-go,' he said as he gave it her.

While she was suspiciously unfolding it, he hurried away, slamming the door behind him, and ran down the dark stairs, into the street.

Old Gadgett

BY SHEILA KAYE-SMITH

THE landlord, the landlord's wife and the landlord's son were sitting in the bar of the 'George' at Bullockdean. It wanted about twenty minutes to opening time, and the pot-boy was polishing the glasses in readiness for six o'clock. The landlord was reading his newspaper – if he couldn't finish it now he'd get no opportunity later, and he liked to be able to talk a bit of politics with the farmers who drank in his bar; his wife was busy with her knitting and counting her stitches out loud, to the suppressed annoyance of his son, who was reading *The Blood on the Wall: a New Adventure of Detective Jim.*

There was a shuffling, scurrying sound outside, followed by a rap on the door.

'Go and see who that is, Dan,' said the landlord's wife. 'We aren't open yet.'

The boy rose regretfully and unlocked the door, revealing an ancient shepherd in charge of some dusty sheep.

'Hullo, Mr. Gadgett! What brings you around at this time?'

'"Tis agone six o'clock, Maas' Sheather.'

'Not for half an hour,' called the landlord's wife.

Mr. Gadgett consulted an elderly turnip.

'My watch says three o'clock, which means ten minnut past six,' he affirmed.

'And my clock says half-past five, which means half-past five,' said Mrs. Sheather.

The old man heaved a deep sigh.

'I come all the way from Brakey Bottom, and there's a wunnerful lot of dust on the roads. Leastways it was wunst on the roads – reckon it's all in my throat now.'

'Poor old chap,' said the landlord, 'I can't see any harm in serving him. It's nearly opening time.'

'Oh no, it isn't,' said his wife, 'and even if it was only two minutes to six, you'd be breaking the law just the same. The law's a fine thing, ain't it, Mr. Gadgett?'

The shepherd looked confused and weary.

'Wot wud six o'clock and two o'clock and ten o'clock, I'm wunnerful muddled.'

Dan felt sorry for him.

'Maybe we could let you have a cup of tea, since it's too early for beer,' he suggested.

'Well, you go into the kitchen and make it,' said his mother, 'since you're the only one who's doing nothing.'

Dan accepted the statement good-humouredly, though his heart yearned for Detective Jim.

'I'm a fine handy one with the tea, ain't I, mum? You come around to the kitchen door, Mr. Gadgett, and I'll give you something to lay the dust.'

Life had taught Daniel Sheather to be handy at most things: he had none of the usual awkwardness and shame of a man making tea. He blew up the dying kitchen fire into a fine roar, filled the kettle with fresh water, fetched tea from the caddy and a cup from the shelf just as efficiently, and a good deal more graciously, than his mother would have done. Old Gadgett watched him from the chair where he sat stiffly, as one unused to rest.

'You're a wunnerful kind young chap, Maas' Sheather, and some day if you'll come around to my house I'll show you wot I ain't shown nobody yet.'

'And what may that be?' asked Daniel.

The old man dropped his voice to a husky whisper.

'My teeth.'

'Your teeth!'

'Yes, you come around to my house and I'll show you my teeth.'

'But I didn't know as you had any,' said Dan, with a rather tactless stare at the thin, receding old mouth.

'No, there ain't many as knows. I don't go wearing them about the place. But I've a wunnerful fine set of teeth.'

'Got 'em at the hospital?' asked Dan, as he set the tea on the table.

Mr. Gadgett, with deliberate, shaking hands, emptied his cup into his saucer, and supped a few mouthfuls before answering impressively:

'No – not I. I made 'em myself.'

'Reckon that was smart of you. How did you do it?'

'It's taken me nigh on ten year. They're sheep's teeth, wot I've picked up on the hill, and rubbed 'em and filed 'em till they're a proper size. And I've strung 'em on two wires, and I hitch 'em around two old stumps I've got . . . you never saw the like.'

Dan was properly impressed.

'Reckon you're a hem clever man, Mr. Gadgett; and I bet you find 'em useful at supper-time.'

Mr. Gadgett looked superior.

'Oh, I'd never use 'em for eating. They ain't that kind of teeth – and I don't say as I can rightly speak wud 'em, I wear 'em for the looks of things. Some day I mean to have my likeness took wud them in. But if you come around to my house I'll show 'em to you.'

'I'll be proud.'

'Reckon it ain't everyone I'd show 'em to. But you've done me a kindness to-day, Maas' Sheather, and it ain't the fust. I often wish as my poor Ellen cud see my teeth, for many's the times she's said: "if we cud only get you fitted for a set of teeth, maaster." . . . Maybe it's that wot put the notion into my head, and I'm larmentable sorry she didn't live to see wot I done. Howsumdever, they may have told her where she's gone. . . . There's my dog barking – reckon the sheep's uneasy; I mun be off, or I'll never be over the hill by sundown. Thank you kindly for the tea, Maas' Sheather.'

He went out, comfortable and slaked. It was now nearly six – a few more minutes would have seen him in legal enjoyment of a glass of beer – but, reflected Daniel, a cup of tea was better for these old chaps.

It was some weeks before he redeemed his promise to 'call around,' and there may have been some excuse in the fact that calling around involved a four-mile tramp across the downs to Alciston. But one evening he met the district nurse, who told him that old Gadgett had taken to his bed with rheumatism, and was not likely ever to leave it again.

'Poor old chap – it ud be a kindness if you'd call and see him,

Mr. Sheather. He's been asking for you more than once. I don't think he'll ever be out with his sheep again, though I tell him he will, just to keep him quiet – he's terribly worried as to how they can manage without him at Place Farm.'

'I can't come to-night, but I'll come to-morrow. Will that do?'

'Oh, fine. He'll be delighted, poor old soul.'

So the next evening Dan set off for Alciston and Place Farm, across Heighton Down, the playground of sea winds and battle-ground of forgotten armies, and then through a webbing of obscure, chalky lanes, to a small, osier-thatched cottage, huddled against the outlying ricks of Place.

The district nurse had just taken her leave, after having made the old man comfortable for the night. He was sitting up in bed, propped against pillows, in the dusky, sag-roofed bedroom, which was so full of furniture that Dan had difficulty in threading his way through to the bedside.

'Hullo, Mr. Gadgett!'

The shepherd did not return his greeting, and when he sat down within the dim circle of the candlelight, he knew the reason. Mr. Gadgett was wearing his teeth.

For a moment Daniel, too, was speechless.

The sight before him was truly an astounding one. The old man had set out not only to supply nature's deficiency but to improve on her perfect work. Instead of thirty-two teeth, he had fifty, twenty-five in each row. The result was a grin of terrible magnitude. . . . Daniel gaped – fortunately he did not feel inclined to laugh. When he considered that the wonder had been given its proper due of amazement the shepherd's jaws worked convulsively as he freed them to express his satisfaction.

'Wunnerful, ain't it?'

'Surelye, Mr. Gadgett.'

'You never thought to see such a set of teeth. A dentist couldn't do it more fine.'

'That he couldn't.'

'It's took me nigh on ten year, getting 'em all together and fixing 'em proper. And now I mun be thinking of having my likeness

took, but I'm that stiff in my bones as maybe it'll be some days before I'm up on the hill – let alone I get into the town.'

'How are you feeling to-night?'

'I feel valiant, save as there's aches in all my bones, and the power is agone from my legs. I asked God how am I to follow the sheep on the hill if He takes the power out of my legs like this?'

'Reckon you'll be better for a good long rest.'

'I'm not so set on that. I'd sooner be out wud the sheep on the hill. But it ain't reasonable to expect it of me, and I've always understood as the Lord is properly reasonable.'

Dan said nothing, feeling uncertain of the matter.

'There's that nurse is an unreasonable woman,' continued the old man – 'to think of me come down to having a nurse, and I done for myself this last twenty year. She's all for putting things where they don't belong, and the trouble I've had wud her notions you'd never believe: "I'm biling the kettle fur your hot water, Mr. Gadgett, to give you a bit of a wash." A bit of a wash! And she washes my chest and my back, which no mortal Christian ud wash between October and May – and she calls that a bit of a wash. . . . I'm like to take my death of cold wud her bits and tricks. . . . She's an unreasonable woman, wot shall never see my teeth. And she's agone and opened the winder, wot's never bin opened since my poor Ellen died and we let her spirit go out on to the hill.'

Daniel was beginning to feel drowsy in the little room, full of the shadows of its crowded furniture. Outside a faint wind had risen and droned under the eaves.

'If I cud only get out to my sheep. There's that fool Botolph's got 'em now. . . . Reckon he'll have 'em all straggled – and the lambing not so far. . . . I mun be up fur the lambing.'

'You'll be up, sure enough, Mr. Gadgett.'

'I mun be up, surelye; or . . . this is a tarble thing to have happened to a poor old man past seventy year. I'm fretted after my sheep; and there's my likeness I want taken. Maas' Sheather, I mun have my likeness taken before I go. So as everyone ull know wot I looked like, wearing my teeth. . . .'

The old voice quavered – evidently Mr. Gadgett felt strongly on the subject.

'Not an illness had I as boy or man,' he continued, 'and now in my old age it comes upon me. Howsumdever, I'll always say as the Lord ain't unreasonable, and I'd have naught against Him if I cud get out to my sheep on the hill . . . before that fool Botolph spiles their fleeces. And if you're going, lad, you mun shut that winder, and I'll tell the nurse as it shut of isself.'

Daniel Sheather was courting, or he would not have allowed another long interval to elapse before he went to see Mr. Gadgett again. However, when everything was settled between him and Marion Stace, he reproached himself for his neglect.

'Let's call around and see him to-night,' he said to his girl; 'he'd be rare pleased to see you, and it'll be a fine, friendly walk for us over the hill.'

So they went out in the last sunshine of the June day, in the slow raking yellow light which strokes the Downs before sunset. Their shadows, long and clear of line, went before them to Alciston, though they lost them in the Bostal Way, where the dusk was already lying between the banks. They found them again in the big ploughed fields of Place, moving over the bright, fierce green of the young oats. . . . Sometimes they were separate, sometimes they were one mingled darkness in which Daniel and Marion stood, as it were married by the sun.

'I'd like us to live in a little house like that,' said Marion when she saw old Gadgett's cottage.

'Ho!' said Dan – 'I'll give you a better. Brick and slate and a couple of bow windows. . . .'

'But this is what I like best, surelye.'

'Lath and plaster and osier-thatch! I'll give you better. . . .'

They went in and found the old man propped up and waiting for them. But he had changed a good deal since Daniel's last visit. The tan was fading from his hands and cheeks, leaving him the queer ghost of himself, who had always been brown as a russet pear. He was also a little inclined to wander in his mind. Daniel was unable to make him quite understand who Marion was. Sometimes she ceased to be Maas' Sheather's young woman, and

became a daughter, Mary, or even once the girl Ellen Bourne, who afterward had been Ellen Gadgett for thirty-five years.

But he willingly showed her his teeth, which he kept under his pillow wrapped in a clean cotton handkerchief.

'They're to be buried with me,' he said, showing his acceptance of that final unreasonableness which allowed not only sickness but death to claim him after seventy-five years.

'Don't talk of burying, Mr. Gadgett,' said Daniel, working at the old illusion, 'you'll be out again yet.'

'No – never again. I mun know it. I'll die in this bed where I lie. Passon he's been to see me, and he reads me solemn out of the Book. Reckon the time's come when I mun go to my own Shepherd. I'd say naun if it wurn't fur the lambing, and that I was unaccountable set on going into the town and having my likeness taken. I asked Passon and Doctor both for a lift into town in their traps, but they both said it cudn't be done. It's a sad thing, surelye – for all the time I was a-making 'em I thought of how fine it ud be to have my likeness took wud a full set of teeth – me as they've soaked the bread fur a dunnamany year. . . . My crusts in hot water, you remember, my dear – so as they shudn't be wasted. You was a wunnerful girl fur waste. . . .'

They left him a few minutes after that, and on the doorstep found the parson, come for an evening call. When he had congratulated Daniel and Marion, they talked of the old man within.

'He won't last much longer now,' said the vicar, 'and one mustn't hope for it. His wife, daughters, everyone – all gone before him. He says he'll be glad to follow. But he's got a queer uncontrollable fancy to have his photograph taken. He's asked both the doctor and me if he couldn't somehow be got into Lewes for it. I don't know who he wants to give it to – he hasn't a soul left.'

'He was talking to us about that, sir,' said Daniel.

'It's probably an effect of his illness – his mind wanders a bit. I offered to take a snapshot of him on a sunny day, but evidently he doesn't trust the amateur.'

He went into the cottage, and the young couple started on their lingering walk over the Down.

They had so much in each other to absorb them that it was not till they were walking through the village that Marion said, 'Daniel, why shouldn't you and me pay for a photographer to go out and take a likeness of old Mr. Gadgett?'

'Would he ever do such a thing?'

'Of course – if he's paid. Why, photographers went out to Beddingham Court the day Miss Alice was married, and took a likeness of her and her bridegroom – and they've been to Place for the foxhounds – and *I* dunno where else besides, for house parties and such.'

'But that's only the big houses. They'd never go to old Gadgett.'

'They'd go if we paid their price, and I don't see why we shouldn't. It'll be a dying comfort to the poor old man. Let's you and me, call in to Robins when we go to Lewes on Saturday, and if it costs a terrible lot of money, we can take it off the cake. . . .'

This might have been the reason why the Sheather-Stace wedding-cake was only two tiers high. Still, everyone said it was a very good cake, and Daniel and Marion, standing flushed and stiff and happy in their respective bridal black and white had no regrets for that topmost crown with its sugar vase and silver hearts. They held secretly themselves the crowning sweetness and silver heart of life, so could dispense with sugar and paper images for their neighbours' delectation.

Besides, as Marion said and Daniel agreed, they had done the proper thing by Mr. Gadgett, poor old soul. He had had his likeness taken, as his heart desired, and they would never forget his delight, though pleasure expressed in a smile of fifty teeth is not the most beautiful thing to remember.

He was almost in his last stupour then, slipping back more and more deeply into the past – into the days of Ellen Gadgett and Mary Gadgett, and deeper still into the days of Ellen Bourne, and then right down at last to the bottom of the house of his mind, where lived another Mary Gadgett, who used to give him his breakfast of flour dumpling and hot water before sending him out with his wooden rattle to scare the birds from the orchards of Heronsdale, over by Waldron where he was born.

But he revived when he saw them come in, Daniel and Marion, and Mr. Robins of Lewes High Street with his camera. They told him what was to happen, and with fumbling old hands he groped under his pillow for his cherished teeth. There they were wrapped up and clean, and soon his pleasure was silent as (helped by Daniel this time) he fixed them ready for action.

Mr. Robins maintained his professional aloofness while the curtains were pulled to and fro over the tiny, hermetically shut window, and the light adjusted – a difficult matter in that low room of gleams and shadows.

'Now, quite still, please – while I count thirty. . . .'

And the marvel was accomplished.

The old man's work had been given its immortality: 'Now everyone ull know I had a set of teeth as fine as anybody's.'

It was the memory of those words which made Daniel and Marion put his photograph with its terrifying smile in a conspicuous place in their new parlour. Otherwise, it would have been excusable of them to have buried it in an album, or at least have hidden it behind the wedding-group on the chiffonier. . . .

'But he wanted himself to be seen,' said Daniel.

So the neighbours saw what old Gadgett himself had never seen, for by the time the proofs were ready he had sunk back so far into the past that it had closed over his head, and neither the present nor the future, with its promise of survival for the work of his hands, could reach him where he drowsed in the old days – strange old days when the railways had not come to Sussex and the stage coach still rolled and lurched in the ruts of the Lewes road . . . bad old days when farm labourers were paid eight shillings a week, and Mary Gadgett had tearfully sent her children out at dusk into the fields to steal turnips. . . .

The Sheathers made their selection from the proofs, doing their best to choose what they thought the old man would have wished. They still hoped he might come back to them for a little before the end, but by the time the prints arrived he was dead. He had followed his Ellen and his two Marys; and the little window of the stuffy room at last stood open, for old Gadgett had gone out on to the hill, to meet his own Shepherd.

Jimmy and the Desperate Woman[1]

BY D. H. LAWRENCE

'He is very fine and strong somewhere, but he does need a level-headed woman to look after him.'

That was the *friendly* feminine verdict upon him. It flattered him, it pleased him, it galled him.

Having divorced a very charming and clever wife, who had held this opinion for ten years, and at last had got tired of the level-headed protective game, his gall was uppermost.

'I want to throw Jimmy out on the world, but I know the poor little man will go and fall on some woman's bosom. That's the worst of him. If he could only stand alone for ten minutes. But he can't. At the same time, there *is* something fine about him, something rare.'

This had been Clarissa's summing up as she floated away in the arms of the rich young American. The rich young American got rather angry when Jimmy's name was mentioned. Clarissa was now *his* wife. But she did sometimes talk as if she were still married to Jimmy.

Not in Jimmy's estimation, however. That worm had turned. Gall was uppermost. Gall and wormwood. He knew exactly what Clarissa thought – and said – about him. And the 'something fine, something rare, something strong' which he was supposed to have 'about him' was utterly outbalanced, in his feelings at least, by the 'poor little man' nestled upon 'some woman's bosom,' which he was supposed to *be*.

'I am *not*,' he said to himself, 'a poor little man nestled upon some woman's bosom. If I could only find the right sort of woman, she should nestle on mine.'

Jimmy was now thirty-five, and this point, to nestle or to be nestled, was the emotional crux and turning-point.

He imagined to himself some really *womanly* woman, to whom he should be *only* 'fine and strong,' and not for one moment

[1] From *England, My England*, by D. H. Lawrence, by permission of Martin Secker.

'the poor little man.' Why not some simple uneducated girl, some Tess of the D'Urbervilles, some wistful Gretchen, some humble Ruth gleaning an aftermath? Why not? Surely the world was full of such!

The trouble was he never met them. He only met sophisticated women. He really never had a chance of meeting 'real' people. So few of us ever do. Only the people we *don't* meet are the 'real' people, the simple, genuine, direct, spontaneous, unspoilt souls. Ah, the simple, genuine, unspoilt people we *don't* meet! What a tragedy it is!

Because, of course, they must be there! Somewhere! Only we never come across them.

Jimmy was terribly handicapped by his position. It brought him into contact with so many people. Only never the right sort. Never the 'real' people: the simple, genuine, unspoilt, etc., etc.

He was editor of a high-class, rather high-brow, rather successful magazine, and his rather personal, very candid editorials brought him shoals, swarms, hosts of admiring acquaintances. Realize that he was handsome, and could be extraordinarily 'nice,' when he liked, and was really very clever, in his own critical way, and you see how many chances he had of being adored and protected.

In the first place his good looks: the fine, clean lines of his face, like the face of the laughing faun in one of the faun's unlaughing, moody moments. The long, clean lines of the cheeks, the strong chin and the slightly arched, full nose, the beautiful dark-grey eyes with long lashes, and the thick black brows. In his mocking moments, when he seemed most himself, it was a pure Pan face, with thick black eyebrows cocked up, and grey eyes with a sardonic goaty gleam, and nose and mouth curling with satire. A good-looking, smooth-skinned satyr. That was Jimmy at his best. In the opinion of his men friends.

In his own opinion, he was a sort of Martyred Saint Sebastian, at whom the wicked world shot arrow after arrow – Mater Dolorosa nothing to him – and he counted the drops of blood as they fell: when he could keep count. Sometimes – as for

instance when Clarissa said she was really departing with the rich young American, and should she divorce Jimmy, or was Jimmy going to divorce her? – then the arrows assailed him like a flight of starlings flying straight at him, jabbing at him, and the drops of martyred blood simply spattered down, he couldn't keep count.

So, naturally he divorced Clarissa.

In the opinion of his men friends, he was, or should be, a consistently grinning faun, satyr, or Pan-person. In his own opinion he was a Martyred Saint Sebastian with the mind of a Plato. In the opinion of his woman friends, he was a fascinating little man with a profound understanding of life and the capacity really to understand a woman and to make a woman feel a queen; which of course was to make a woman feel her *real* self. . . .

He might, naturally, have made rich and resounding marriages, especially after the divorce. He didn't. The reason was, secretly, his resolve never to make any woman feel a queen any more. It was the turn of the women to make him feel a king.

Some unspoilt, unsophisticated, wild-blooded woman, to whom he would be a sort of Solomon of wisdom, beauty, and wealth. She would need to be in reduced circumstances to appreciate his wealth, which amounted to the noble sum of three thousand pounds and a little week-ending cottage in Hampshire. And to be unsophisticated she would have to be a woman of the people. Absolutely.

At the same time, not just the 'obscure vulgar simplican.'

He received many letters, many, many, many, enclosing poems, stories, articles, or more personal unbosomings. He read them all: like a solemn rook pecking and scratching among the litter.

And one – not one letter, but one correspondent – might be *the* one – Mrs. Emilia Pinnegar, who wrote from a mining village in Yorkshire. She was, of course, unhappily married.

Now Jimmy had always had a mysterious feeling about these dark and rather dreadful mining villages in the north. He himself had scarcely set foot north of Oxford. He felt that these miners up there must be the real stuff. And Pinnegar was a name, surely! And Emilia!

She wrote a poem, with a brief little note, that, if the editor of the *Commentator* thought the verses of no value, would he simply destroy them. Jimmy, as editor of the *Commentator*, thought the verses quite good and admired the brevity of the note. But he wasn't sure about printing the poem. He wrote back, Had Mrs. Pinnegar nothing else to submit?

Then followed a correspondence. And at length, upon request, this from Mrs. Pinnegar:

'You ask me about myself, but what shall I say? I am a woman of thirty-one, with one child, a girl of eight, and I am married to a man who lives in the same house with me, but goes to another woman. I try to write poetry, if it is poetry, because I have no other way of expressing myself at all, and, even if it doesn't matter to anybody besides myself, I feel I must and will express myself, if only to save myself from developing cancer or some disease that women have. I was a school-teacher before I was married, and I got my certificates at Rotherham College. If I could, I would teach again, and live alone. But married women teachers can't get jobs any more, they aren't allowed –'

THE COAL-MINER

BY HIS WIFE

The donkey-engine's beating noise
And the rattle, rattle of the sorting screens
Come down on me like the beat of his heart,
And mean the same as his breathing means.

The burning big pit-hill with fumes
Fills the air like the presence of that fair-haired man.
And the burning fire burning deeper and deeper
Is his will insisting since time began.

As he breathes the chair goes up and down
In the pit-shaft; he lusts like the wheel-fans spin
The sucking air: he lives in the coal
Underground: and his soul is a strange engine.

That is the manner of man he is.
I married him and I should know.
The mother earth from bowels of coal
Brought him forth for the overhead woe.

This was the poem that the editor of the *Commentator* hesitated about. He reflected, also, that Mrs. Pinnegar didn't sound like one of the nestling, unsophisticated rustic type. It was something else that still attracted him: something desperate in a woman, something tragic.

THE NEXT EVENT

If at evening, when the twilight comes,
  You ask me what the day has been,
I shall not know. The distant drums
  Of some new-comer intervene

Between me and the day that's been.
  Some strange man leading long columns
Of unseen soldiers through the green
  Sad twilight of these smoky slums.

And as the darkness slowly numbs
  My senses, everything I've seen
Or heard the daylight through, becomes
  Rubbish behind an opaque screen.

Instead, the sound of muffled drums
  Inside myself: I have to lean
And listen as my strength succumbs,
  To hear what these oncomings mean.

Perhaps the Death-God striking his thumbs
  On the drums in a deadly rat-ta-ta-plan
Or a strange man marching slow as he strums
  The tune of a new weird hope in Man.

What does it matter! The day that began
In coal-dust is ending the same, in crumbs
Of darkness like coal. I live if I can;
If I can't, then I welcome whatever comes.

This poem sounded so splendidly desperate, the editor of the *Commentator* decided to print it, and, moreover, to see the authoress. He wrote, Would she care to see him, if he happened to be in her neighbourhood? He was going to lecture in Sheffield. She replied, Certainly.

He gave his afternoon lecture, on *Men in Books and Men in Life*. Naturally, men in books came first. Then he caught a train to reach the mining village where the Pinnegars lived.

It was February, with gruesome patches of snow. It was dark when he arrived at Mill Valley, a sort of thick, turgid darkness full of menace, where men speaking in a weird accent went past like ghosts, dragging their heavy feet and emitting the weird scent of the coal-mine underworld. Weird and a bit gruesome it was.

He knew he had to walk uphill to the little market-place. As he went, he looked back and saw the black valleys with bunches of light, like camps of demons it seemed to him. And the demonish smell of sulphur and coal in the air, in the heavy, pregnant, clammy darkness.

They directed him to New London Lane, and down he went down another hill. His skin crept a little. The place felt uncanny and hostile, hard, as if iron and minerals breathed into the black air. Thank goodness he couldn't see much, or be seen. When he had to ask his way the people treated him in a 'heave-half-a-brick-at-him' fashion.

After much weary walking and asking, he entered a lane between trees, in the cold slushy mud of the unfrozen February. The mines, apparently, were on the outskirts of the town, in some mud-sunk country. He could see the red, sore fires of the burning pit-hill through the trees, and he smelt the sulphur. He felt like some modern Ulysses wandering in the realms of Hecate. How much more dismal and horrible, a modern Odyssey among mines and factories, than any Sirens, Scyllas or Charybdises.

So he mused to himself as he waded through icy black mud, in a black lane, under black trees that moaned an accompaniment to the sound of the coal-mine's occasional hissing and chuffing, under a black sky that quenched even the electric sparkle of the colliery. And the place seemed unhabitated like a cold black jungle.

At last he came in sight of a glimmer. Apparently, there were dwellings. Yes, a new little street, with one street-lamp and the houses all apparently dark. He paused. Absolute desertion. Then three children.

They told him the house, and he stumbled up a dark passage. There was light on the little back yard. He knocked, in some trepidation. A rather tall woman, looking down at him with a 'Who are you?' look, from the step above.

'Mrs. Pinnegar?'

'Oh, it is you, Mr. Frith? Come in.'

He stumbled up the step into the glaring light of the kitchen. There stood Mrs. Pinnegar, a tall woman with a face like a mask of passive anger, looking at him coldly. Immediately he felt his own shabbiness and smallness. In utter confusion, he stuck out his hand.

'I had an awful time getting here,' he said. 'I'm afraid I shall make a frightful mess of your house.' He looked down at his boots.

'That's all right,' she said. 'Have you had your tea?'

'No – but don't you bother about me.'

There was a little girl with fair hair in a fringe over her forehead, troubled blue eyes under the fringe, and two dolls. He felt easier.

'Is this your little girl?' he asked. 'She's awfully nice. What is her name?'

'Jane.'

'How are you, Jane?' he said. But the child only stared at him with the baffled, bewildered, pained eyes of a child who lives with hostile parents.

Mrs. Pinnegar set his tea, bread and butter, jam, and buns. Then she sat opposite him. She was handsome, dark straight

brows and grey eyes with yellow grains in them, and a way of looking straight at you as if she were used to holding her own. Her eyes were the nicest part of her. They had a certain kindliness, mingled, like the yellow grains among the grey, with a relentless, unyielding feminine will. Her nose and mouth were straight, like a Greek mask, and the expression was fixed. She gave him at once the impression of a woman who has made a mistake, who knows it, but who will not change: who cannot now change.

He felt very uneasy. Being a rather small, shambling man, she made him aware of his physical inconspicuousness. And she said not a word, only looked down on him, as he drank his tea, with that changeless look of a woman who is holding her own against Man and Fate. While, from the corner across the kitchen, the little girl, with her fair hair and her dolls, watched him also in absolute silence, from her hot blue eyes.

'This seems a pretty awful place,' he said to her.

'It is. It's absolutely awful,' the woman said.

'You ought to get away from it,' he said.

But she received this in dead silence.

It was exceedingly difficult to make any headway. He asked about Mr. Pinnegar. She glanced at the clock.

'He comes up at nine,' she said.

'Is he down the mine?'

'Yes. He's on the afternoon shift.'

There was never a sound from the little girl.

'Doesn't Jane ever talk?' he asked.

'Not much,' said the mother, glancing round.

He talked a little about his lectures, about Sheffield, about London. But she was not really interested. She sat there rather distant, very laconic, looking at him with those curious unyielding eyes. She looked to him like a woman who has had her revenge, and is left stranded on the reefs, where she wrecked her opponent. Still unrelenting, unregretting, unyielding, she seemed rather undecided as to what her revenge had been, and what it had all been about.

'You ought to get away from here,' he said to her.

'Where to?' she asked.

'Oh' – he made a vague gesture – 'anywhere, so long as it is *quite* away.'

She seemed to ponder this, under her portentous brow.

'I don't see what difference it would make,' she said. Then glancing round at her child: 'I don't see what difference anything would make, except getting out of the world altogether. But there's *her* to consider.' And she jerked her head in the direction of the child.

Jimmy felt definitely frightened. He wasn't used to this sort of grimness. At the same time he was excited. This handsome, laconic woman, with her soft brown hair and her unflinching eyes with their gold flecks, seemed to be challenging him to something. There was a touch of challenge in her remaining gold-flecked kindness. Somewhere, she had a heart. But what had happened to it? And why?

What had gone wrong with her? In some way, she must have gone against herself.

'Why don't you come and live with me?' he said, like the little gambler he was.

The queer, conflicting smile was on his face. He had taken up her challenge, like a gambler. The very sense of a gamble, in which he could not lose desperately, excited him. At the same time, he was scared of her, and determined to get beyond his scare.

She sat and watched him, with the faintest touch of a grim smile on her handsome mouth.

'How do you mean, live with you?' she said.

'Oh – I mean what it usually means,' he said, with a little puff of self-conscious laughter.

'You're evidently not happy here. You're evidently in the wrong circumstances altogether. You're obviously *not* just an ordinary woman. Well, then, break away. When I say, Come and live with me, I mean just what I say. Come to London and live with me, as my wife, if you like, and then if we want to marry, when you get a divorce, why, we can do it.'

Jimmy made this speech more to himself than to the woman. That was how he was. He worked out all his things inside himself,

as if it were all merely an interior problem of his own. And while he did so, he had an odd way of squinting his left eye and wagging his head loosely, like a man talking absolutely to himself, and turning his eyes inwards.

The woman watched him in a sort of wonder. This was something she was *not* used to. His extraordinary manner, and his extraordinarily bald proposition, roused her from her own tense apathy.

'Well!' she said. 'That's got to be thought about. What about *her*?' – and again she jerked her head towards the round-eyed child in the corner. Jane sat with a completely expressionless face, her little red mouth fallen a little open. She seemed in a sort of trance: as if she understood like a grown-up person, but, as a child, sat in a trance, unconscious.

The mother wheeled round in her chair and stared at her child. The little girl stared back at her mother, with hot, troubled almost guilty blue eyes. And neither said a word. Yet they seemed to exchange worlds of meaning.

'Why, of course,' said Jimmy, twisting his head again; 'she'd come, too.'

The woman gave a last look at her child, then turned to him, and started watching *him* with that slow, straight stare.

'It's not' – he began, stuttering –' it's not anything *sudden* and unconsidered on my part. I've been considering it for quite a long time – ever since I had the first poem, and your letter.'

He spoke still with his eyes turned inwards, talking to himself. And the woman watched him unflinchingly.

'Before you ever saw me?' she asked, with a queer irony.

'Oh, of course. Of course before I ever saw you. Or else I never *should* have seen you. From the very first, I had a definite feeling –'

He made odd, sharp gestures, like a drunken man, and he spoke like a drunken man, his eyes turned inwards, talking to himself. The woman was no more than a ghost moving inside his own consciousness, and he was addressing her there.

The actual woman sat outside looking on in a sort of wonder. This was really something new to her.

'And now you see me, do you want me, really, to come to London?'

She spoke in a dull tone of incredulity. The thing was just a little preposterous to her. But why not? It would have to be something a little preposterous, to get her out of the tomb she was in.

'Of course I do!' he cried, with another scoop of his head and scoop of his hand. '*Now* I do *actually* want you, now I actually see you.' He never looked at her. His eyes were still turned in. He was still talking to himself, in a sort of drunkenness with himself.

To her, it was something extraordinary. But it roused her from apathy.

He became aware of the hot blue eyes of the hot-cheeked little girl fixed upon him from the distant corner. And he gave a queer little giggle.

'Why, it's more than I could ever have hoped for,' he said, 'to have you and Jane to live with me! Why, it will mean *life* to me.' He spoke in an odd, strained voice, slightly delirious. And for the first time he looked up at the woman and, apparently, *straight* at her. But, even as he seemed to look straight at her, the curious cast was in his eye, and he was only looking at himself, inside himself, at the shadows inside his own consciousness.

'And when would you like me to come?' she asked, rather coldly.

'Why, as soon as possible. Come back with me to-morrow, if you will. I've got a little house in St. John's Wood, *waiting* for you. Come with me to-morrow. That's the simplest.'

She watched him for some time, as he sat with ducked head. He looked like a man who is drunk – drunk with himself. He was going bald at the crown, his rather curly black hair was thin.

'I couldn't come to-morrow, I should need a few days,' she said.

She wanted to see his face again. It was as if she could not remember what his face was like, this strange man who had appeared out of nowhere, with such a strange proposition.

He lifted his face, his eyes still cast in that inturned, blind

look. He looked now like a Mephistopheles who has gone blind. With his black brows cocked up, Mephistopheles, Mephistopheles blind and begging in the street.

'Why, of course it's wonderful that it's happened like this for me,' he said, with odd pouting emphasis, pushing out his lips. 'I was finished, absolutely finished. I was finished while Clarissa was with me. But after she'd gone, I was *absolutely* finished. And I thought there was no chance for me in the world again. It seems to me perfectly marvellous that this has happened – that I've come across you –' he lifted his face sightlessly – 'and Jane – Jane – why she's *really* too good to be true.' He gave a slight hysterical laugh. 'She really is.'

The woman, and Jane, watched him with some embarrassment.

'I shall have to settle up here, with Mr. Pinnegar,' she said, rather coldly musing. 'Do you want to see him?'

'Oh, I –' he said, with a deprecating gesture, 'I don't *care*. But if you think I'd better – why, certainly –'

'I do think you'd better,' she said.

'Very well, then, I *will*. I'll see him whenever you like.'

'He comes in soon after nine,' she said.

'All right, I'll see him then. Much better. But I suppose I'd better see about finding a place to sleep first. Better not leave it too late.'

'I'll come with you and ask for you.'

'Oh, you'd better not, really. If you tell me where to go –'

He had taken on a protective tone: he was protecting her against herself and against scandal. It was his manner, his rather Oxfordy manner, more than anything else, that went beyond her. She wasn't used to it.

Jimmy plunged out into the gulfing blackness of the Northern night, feeling how horrible it was, but pressing his hat on his brow in a sense of strong adventure. He was going through with it.

At the baker's shop, where she had suggested he should ask for a bed, they would have none of him. Absolutely they didn't like the looks of him. At the Pub, too, they shook their heads: didn't want to have anything to do with him. But, in a voice more expostulatingly Oxford than ever, he said:

'But look here – you can't ask a man to sleep under one of these hedges. Can't I see the landlady?'

He persuaded the landlady to promise to let him sleep on the big, soft settee in the parlour, where the fire was burning brightly. Then, saying he would be back about ten, he returned through mud and drizzle up New London Lane.

The child was in bed, a saucepan was boiling by the fire. Already the lines had softened a little in the woman's face.

She spread a cloth on the table. Jimmy sat in silence, feeling that she was hardly aware of his presence. She was absorbed, no doubt, in the coming of her husband. The stranger merely sat on the sofa, and waited. He felt himself wound up tight. And once he was really wound up, he could go through with anything.

They heard the nine-o'clock whistle at the mine. The woman then took the saucepan from the fire and went into the scullery. Jimmy could smell the smell of potatoes being strained. He sat quite still. There was nothing for him to do or to say. He was wearing his big black-rimmed spectacles, and his face, blank and expressionless in the suspense of waiting, looked like the death-mask of some sceptical philosopher, who could wait through the ages, and who could hardly distinguish life from death at any time.

Came the heavy-shod tread up the house entry, and the man entered, rather like a blast of wind. The fair moustache stuck out from the blackish, mottled face, and the fierce blue eyes rolled their whites in the coal-blackened sockets.

'This gentleman is Mr. Frith,' said Emily Pinnegar.

Jimmy got up, with a bit of an Oxford wriggle, and held out his hand, saying: 'How do you do?'

His grey eyes, behind the spectacles, had an uncanny whitish gleam.

'My hand's not fit to shake hands,' said the miner. 'Take a seat.'

'Oh, nobody minds coal-dust,' said Jimmy, subsiding on to the sofa. 'It's clean dirt.'

'They say so,' said Pinnegar.

He was a man of medium height, thin, but energetic in build.

Mrs. Pinnegar was running hot water into a pail from the

bright brass tap of the stove, which had a boiler to balance the oven. Pinnegar dropped heavily into a wooden arm-chair, and stooped to pull off his ponderous grey pit-boots. He smelled of the strange, stale underground. In silence he pulled on his slippers, then rose, taking his boots into the scullery. His wife followed with the pail of hot water. She returned and spread a coarse roller-towel on the steel fender. The man could be heard washing in the scullery, in the semi-dark. Nobody said anything. Mrs. Pinnegar attended to her husband's dinner.

After awhile, Pinnegar came running in, naked to the waist, and squatted plumb in front of the big red fire, on his heels. His head and face and front part of his body were all wet. His back was grey and unwashed. He seized the towel from the fender and began to rub his face and head with a sort of brutal vigour, while his wife brought a bowl, and with a soapy flannel silently washed his back, right down to the loins, where the trousers were rolled back. The man was entirely oblivious of the stranger – this washing was part of the collier's ritual, and nobody existed for the moment. The woman, washing her husband's back, stooping there as he kneeled with knees wide apart, squatting on his heels on the rag hearthrug, had a peculiar look on her strong, handsome face, a look sinister and derisive. She was deriding something or somebody; but Jimmy could not make out whom or what.

It was a new experience for him to sit completely and brutally excluded from a personal ritual. The collier vigorously rubbed his own fair short hair, till it all stood on end, then he stared into the red-hot fire, oblivious, while the red colour burned in his cheeks. Then again he rubbed his breast and his body with the rough towel, brutally, as if his body were some machine he was cleaning, while his wife, with a peculiar slow movement, dried his back with another towel.

She took away the towel and bowl. The man was dry. He still squatted with his hands on his knees, gazing abstractedly, blankly into the fire. That, too, seemed part of his daily ritual. The colour flushed in his cheeks, his fair moustache was rubbed on end. But his hot blue eyes stared hot and vague into the red coals, while the red glare of the coal fell on his breast and naked body.

He was a man of about thirty-five, in his prime, with a pure smooth skin and no fat on his body. His muscles were not large, but quick, alive with energy. And as he squatted bathing abstractedly in the glow of the fire, he seemed like some pure-moulded engine that sleeps between its motions, with incomprehensible eyes of dark iron-blue.

He looked round, always averting his face from the stranger on the sofa, shutting him out of consciousness. The wife took out a bundle from the dresser-cupboard, and handed it to the outstretched, work-scarred hand of the man on the hearth. Curious, that big, horny, work-battered clean hand, at the end of the suave, thin naked arm.

Pinnegar unrolled his shirt and undervest in front of the fire, warmed them for a moment in the glow, vaguely, sleepily, then pulled them over his head. And then at last he rose, with his shirt hanging over his trousers, and in the same abstract, sleepy way, shutting the world out of his consciousness, he went out again to the scullery, pausing at the same dresser-cupboard to take out his rolled-up day trousers.

Mrs. Pinnegar took away the towels and set the dinner on the table – rich, oniony stew out of a hissing brown stew-jar, boiled potatoes, and a cup of tea. The man returned from the scullery, in his clean flannelette shirt and black trousers, his fair hair neatly brushed. He planked his wooden arm-chair beside the table and sat heavily down, to eat.

Then he looked at Jimmy, as one wary, probably hostile, man looks at another.

'You're a stranger in these parts, I gather?' he said. There was something slightly formal, even a bit pompous, in his speech.

'An absolute stranger,' replied Jimmy, with a slight aside grin.

The man dabbed some mustard on his plate, and glanced at his food to see if he would like it.

'Come from a distance, do you?' he asked, as he began to eat. As he ate, he seemed to become oblivious again of Jimmy, bent his head over his plate, and ate. But probably he was ruminating something all the time, with barbaric wariness.

'From London,' said Jimmy, warily.

'London!' said Pinnegar, without looking from his plate.

Mrs. Pinnegar came and sat, in ritualistic silence, in her tall-backed rocking-chair under the light.

'What brings you this way, then?' asked Pinnegar, stirring his tea.

'Oh!' Jimmy writhed a little on the sofa. 'I came to see Mrs. Pinnegar.'

The miner took a hasty gulp of tea.

'You're acquainted then, are you?' he said, still without looking round. He sat with his side-face to Jimmy.

'Yes, we are *now*,' explained Jimmy. 'I didn't know Mrs. Pinnegar till this evening. As a matter of fact, she sent me some poems for the *Commentator* – I'm the editor – and I thought they were good, so I wrote and told her so. Then I felt I wanted to come and see her, and she was willing, so I came.'

The man reached out, cut himself a piece of bread, and swallowed a large mouthful.

'You thought her poetry was good?' he said, turning at last to Jimmy and looking straight at him, with a stare something like the child's, but aggressive. 'Are you going to put it in your magazine?'

'Yes, I think I am,' said Jimmy.

'I never read but one of her poems – something about a collier she knew all about, because she'd married him,' he said, in his peculiar harsh voice, that had a certain jeering clang in it, and a certain indomitableness.

Jimmy was silent. The other man's harsh fighting-voice made him shrink.

'I could never get on with the *Commentator* myself,' said Pinnegar, looking round for his pudding, pushing his meat-plate aside. 'Seems to me to go a long way round to get nowhere.'

'Well, probably it *does*,' said Jimmy, squirming a little. 'But so long as the way is interesting! I don't see that anything gets anywhere at present – certainly no periodical.'

'I don't know,' said Pinnegar. 'There's some facts in the *Liberator* – and there's some ideas in the *Janus*. I can't see the use

myself, of all these feelings folk say they have. They get you nowhere.'

'But,' said Jimmy, with a slight pouf of laughter, 'where do you *want* to get? It's all very well talking about getting somewhere, but where, where in the world to-day do you *want* to get? In general, I mean. If you want a better job in the mine – all right, go ahead and get it. But when you begin to talk about getting somewhere, in *life* – why, you've got to know what you're talking about.'

'I'm a man, aren't I?' said the miner, going very still and hard.

'But what do you *mean*, when you say you're a man?' snarled Jimmy, really exasperated. 'What do you mean? Yes, you *are* a man. But what about it?'

'Haven't I the right to say I won't be made use of?' said the collier, slow, harsh, and heavy.

'You've got a right to *say* it,' retorted Jimmy, with a pouf of laughter. 'But it doesn't *mean* anything. We're all made use of, from King George downwards. We have to be. When you eat your pudding you're making use of hundreds of people – including your wife.'

'I know it. I know it. It makes no difference, though. I'm not going to be made use of.'

Jimmy shrugged his shoulders.

'Oh, all right!' he said. 'That's just a phrase, like any other.'

The miner sat very still in his chair, his face going hard and remote. He was evidently thinking over something that was stuck like a barb in his consciousness, something he was trying to harden over, as the skin sometimes hardens over a steel splinter in the flesh.

'I'm nothing but made use of,' he said, now talking hard and final, to himself, and staring out into space. 'Down the pit, I'm made use of, and they give me a wage, such as it is. At the house, I'm made use of, and my wife sets the dinner on the table as if I was a customer in a shop.'

'But what do you *expect*?' cried Jimmy, writhing in his chair.

'Me? What do I expect? I expect nothing. But I tell you

what –' he turned, and looked straight and hard into Jimmy's eyes – 'I'm not going to put up with anything, either.'

Jimmy saw the hard finality in the other man's eyes, and squirmed away from it.

'If you *know* what you're not going to put up with –' he said.

'I don't want my wife writing poetry! And sending it to a parcel of men she's never seen. *I* don't want my wife sitting like Queen Boadicea, when I come home, and a face like a stone wall with holes in it. I don't know what's wrong with her. She doesn't know herself. But she does as she likes. Only, mark you, I do the same.'

'Of course!' cried Jimmy, though there was no of course about it.

'She's told you I've got another woman?'

'Yes.'

'And I'll tell you for why. If I give in to the coal face, and go down the mine every day to eight hours' slavery, more or less, somebody's got to give in to me.'

'Then,' said Jimmy, after a pause, 'if you mean you want your wife to submit to you – well, that's the problem. You have to marry the woman who *will* submit.'

It was amazing, this from Jimmy. He sat there and lectured the collier like a Puritan Father, completely forgetting the disintegrating flutter of Clarissa, in his own background.

'I want a wife who'll please me, who'll want to please me,' said the collier.

'Why should *you* be pleased, any more than anybody else?' asked the wife coldly.

'My child, my little girl wants to please me – if her mother would let her. But the women hang together. I tell you' – and here he turned to Jimmy, with a blaze in his dark-blue eyes – 'I want a woman to please me, a woman who's anxious to please me. And if I can't find her in my own home, I'll find her out of it.'

'I hope she pleases you,' said the wife, rocking slightly.

'Well,' said the man, 'she does.'

'Then why don't you go and live with her altogether?' she said.

He turned and looked at her.

'Why don't I?' he said. 'Because I've got my home. I've got

my house, I've got my wife, let her be what she may, as a woman to live with. And I've got my child. Why should I break it all up?'

'And what about me?' she asked coldly and fiercely.

'You? You've got a home. You've got a child. You've got a man who works for you. You've got what you want. You do as you like –'

'Do I?' she asked, with intolerable sarcasm.

'Yes. Apart from the bit of work in the house, you do as you like. If you want to go, you can go. But while you live in my house, you must respect it. You bring no men here, you see.'

'Do *you* respect your home?' she said.

'Yes! I do! If I get another women – who pleases me – I deprive you of nothing. All I ask of you is to do your duty as a housewife.'

'Down to washing your back!' she said, heavily sarcastic; and, Jimmy thought, a trifle vulgar.

'Down to washing my back, since it's got to be washed,' he said.

'What about the other woman? Let her do it.'

'This is my home.'

The wife gave a strange movement, like a mad woman.

Jimmy sat rather pale and frightened. Behind the collier's quietness he felt the concentration of almost cold anger and an unchanging will. In the man's lean face he could see the bones, the fixity of the male bones, and it was as if the human soul, or spirit, had gone into the living skull and skeleton, almost invulnerable.

Jimmy, for some strange reason, felt a wild anger against this bony and logical man. It was the hard-driven coldness, fixity, that he could not bear.

'Look here!' he cried, in a resonant Oxford voice, his eyes glaring and casting inwards behind his spectacles. 'You say Mrs. Pinnegar is *free* – free to do as she pleases. In that case, you have no objection if she comes with me right away from here.'

The collier looked at the pale, strange face of the editor in wonder. Jimmy kept his face slightly averted and sightless, seeing nobody. There was a Mephistophelian tilt about the eyebrows, and a Martyred Sebastian straightness about the mouth.

'Does she *want* to?' asked Pinnegar, with devastating incredulity.

The wife smiled faintly, grimly. She could see the vanity of her husband in his utter inability to believe that she could prefer the other man to him.

'That,' said Jimmy, 'you must ask her yourself. But it's what I came here for: to ask her to come and live with me, and bring the child.'

'You came without having seen her, to ask her that?' said the husband, in growing wonder.

'Yes,' said Jimmy, vehemently, nodding his head with drunken emphasis. 'Yes! Without ever having seen her!'

'You've caught a funny fish this time, with your poetry,' he said, turning with curious husband-familiarity to his wife. She hated this off-hand husband-familiarity.

'What sort of fish have *you* caught?' she retorted. 'And what did you catch *her* with?'

'Bird-lime!' he said, with a faint, quick grin.

Jimmy was sitting in suspense. They all three sat in suspense, for some time.

'And what are you saying to him?' said the collier at length.

Jimmy looked up, and the malevolent half-smile on his face made him look rather handsome again, a mixture of faun and Mephisto. He glanced curiously, invitingly, at the woman who was watching him from afar.

'I say yes!' she replied, in a cool voice.

The husband became very still, sitting erect in his wooden armchair and staring into space. It was as if he were fixedly watching something fly away from him, out of his own soul. But he was not going to yield at all, to any emotion.

He could not now believe that this woman should *want* to leave him. Yet she did.

'I'm sure it's all for the best,' said Jimmy, in his Puritan Father voice. 'You don't mind, really' – he drawled uneasily – 'if she brings the child. I give you my word I'll do my very best for it.'

The collier looked at him as if he were very far away. Jimmy

quailed under the look. He could see that the other man was relentlessly killing the emotion in himself, stripping himself, as it were, of his own flesh, stripping himself to the hard, unemotional bone of the human male.

'I give her a blank cheque,' said Pinnegar, with numb lips. 'She does as she pleases.'

'So much for fatherly love, compared with selfishness,' she said.

He turned and looked at her with that curious power of remote anger. And immediately she became still, quenched.

'I give you a blank cheque, as far as I'm concerned,' he repeated abstractedly.

'It *is* blank indeed!' she said, with her first touch of bitterness.

Jimmy looked at the clock. It was growing late: he might be shut out of the public-house. He rose to go, saying he would return in the morning. He was leaving the next day, at noon, for London.

He plunged into the darkness and mud of that black, night-ridden country. There was a curious elation in his spirits, mingled with fear. But then he always needed an element of fear, really, to elate him. He thought with terror of those two human beings left in that house together. The frightening state of tension! He himself could never bear an extreme tension. He always had to compromise, to become apologetic and pathetic. He would be able to manage Mrs. Pinnegar that way. Emily! He must get used to saying it. Emily! The Emilia was absurd. He had never known an Emily.

He felt really scared, and really elated. He was doing something big. It was not that he was *in love* with the woman. But, my God, he wanted to take her away from that man. And he wanted the adventure of her. Absolutely the adventure of her. He felt really elated, really himself, really manly.

But in the morning he returned rather sheepishly to the collier's house. It was another dark, drizzling day, with black trees, black road, black hedges, blackish brick houses, and the smell and the sound of collieries under a skyless day. Like living in some weird underground.

Unwillingly he went up that passage-entry again, and knocked

at the back door, glancing at the miserable little back garden with its cabbage-stalks and its ugly sanitary arrangements.

The child opened the door to him: with her fair hair, flushed cheeks, and hot, dark-blue eyes.

'Hullo, Jane!' he said.

The mother stood tall and square, by the table, watching him with portentous eyes, as he entered. She was handsome, but her skin was not very good: as if the battle had been too much for her health. Jimmy glanced up at her, smiling his slow, ingratiating smile, that always brought a glow of success into a woman's spirit. And as he saw her gold-flecked eyes searching in his eyes, without a bit of kindliness, he thought to himself: 'My God, however am I going to sleep with that woman!' His will was ready, however, and he would manage it somehow.

And when he glanced at the motionless, bony head and lean figure of the collier seated in the wooden arm-chair by the fire, he was the more ready. He must triumph over that man.

'What train are you going by?' asked Mrs. Pinnegar.

'By the twelve-thirty.' He looked up at her as he spoke, with the wide, shining, childlike, almost coy eyes that were his peculiar asset. She looked down at him in a sort of interested wonder. She seemed almost fascinated by his childlike, shining, inviting dark-grey eyes, with their long lashes: such an absolute change from that resentful unyielding that looked out always from the back of her husband's blue eyes. Her husband always seemed like a menace to her, in his thinness, his concentration, his eternal unyielding. And this man looked at one with the wide, shining, fascinating eyes of a young Persian kitten, something at once bold and shy and coy and strangely inviting. She fell at once under their spell.

'You'll have dinner before you go,' she said.

'No!' he cried in panic, unwilling indeed to eat before that other man. 'No, I ate a fabulous breakfast. I will get a sandwich when I change in Sheffield – *really!*'

She had to go out shopping. She said she would go out to the station with him when she got back. It was just after eleven.

'But look here,' he said, addressing also the thin abstracted man

who sat unnoticing, with a newspaper, 'we've got to get this thing settled. I *want* Mrs. Pinnegar to come and live with me, her and the child. And she's coming! So don't you think, now, it would be better if she came right along with me to-day! Just put a few things in a bag and come along. Why drag the thing out?'

'I tell you,' replied the husband, 'she has a blank cheque from me to do as she likes.'

'All right, then! Won't you do that? Won't you come along with me now?' said Jimmy, looking up at her exposedly, but casting his eyes a bit inwards. Throwing himself with deliberate impulsiveness on her mercy.

'I can't!' she said decisively. 'I can't come to-day.'

'But why not – really? Why not, while I'm here? You have that blank cheque, you can do as you please – '

'The blank cheque won't get me far,' she said rudely; 'I can't come to-day, anyhow.'

'When can you come, then?' he said, with that queer, petulant pleading. 'The sooner the better, surely.'

'I can come on Monday,' she said abruptly.

'Monday!' He gazed up at her in a kind of panic, through his spectacles. Then he set his teeth again, and nodded his head up and down. 'All right, then! To-day is Saturday. Then Monday!'

'If you'll excuse me,' she said, 'I've got to go out for a few things. I'll walk to the station with you when I get back.'

She bundled Jane into a little sky-blue coat and bonnet, put on a heavy black coat and black hat herself, and went out.

Jimmy sat very uneasily opposite the collier, who also wore spectacles to read. Pinnegar put down the newspaper and pulled the spectacles off his nose, saying something about a Labour Government.

'Yes,' said Jimmy. 'After all, best be logical. If you *are* democratic, the only logical thing is a Labour Government. Though, personally, one Government is as good as another, to me.'

'Maybe so!' said the collier. 'But *something's* got to come to an end, sooner or later.'

'Oh a great deal!' said Jimmy, and they lapsed into silence.

'Have you been married before?' asked Pinnegar at length.

'Yes. My wife and I are divorced.'

'I suppose you want me to divorce *my* wife?' said the collier.

'Why – yes! – that would be best –'

'It's the same to me,' said Pinnegar; 'divorce or no divorce. I'll *live* with another woman, but I'll never *marry* another. Enough is as good as a feast. But if she wants a divorce, she can have it.'

'It would certainly be best,' said Jimmy.

There was a long pause. Jimmy wished the woman would come back.

'I look on you as an instrument,' said the miner. 'Something had to break. You are the instrument that breaks it.'

It was strange to sit in the room with this thin, remote, wilful man. Jimmy was a bit fascinated by him. But, at the same time, he hated him because he could not be in the same room with him without being under his spell. He felt himself dominated. And he hated it.

'My wife,' said Pinnegar, looking up at Jimmy with a peculiar, almost humorous, teasing grin, 'expects to see me go to the dogs when she leaves me. It is her last hope.'

Jimmy ducked his head and was silent, not knowing what to say. The other man sat still in his chair, like a sort of infinitely patient prisoner, looking away out of the window and waiting.

'She thinks,' he said again, 'that she has some wonderful future awaiting her somewhere, and you're going to open the door.'

And again the same amused grin was in his eyes.

And again Jimmy was fascinated by the man. And again he hated the spell of this fascination. For Jimmy wanted to be, in his own mind, the strongest man among men, but particularly among women. And this thin, peculiar man could dominate him. He knew it. The very silent unconsciousness of Pinnegar dominated the room, wherever he was.

Jimmy hated this.

At last Mrs. Pinnegar came back and Jimmy set off with her. He shook hands with the collier.

'Good-bye!' he said.

'Good-bye!' said Pinnegar, looking down at him with those

amused blue eyes, which Jimmy knew he would never be able to get beyond.

And the walk to the station was almost a walk of conspiracy against the man left behind, between the man in spectacles and the tall woman. They arranged the details for Monday. Emily was to come by the nine o'clock train: Jimmy would meet her at Marylebone, and install her in his house in St. John's Wood. Then, with the child, they would begin a new life. Pinnegar would divorce his wife, or she would divorce him: and then, another marriage.

Jimmy got a tremendous kick out of it all on the journey home. He felt he had really done something desperate and adventurous. But he was in too wild a flutter to analyse any results. Only, as he drew near London, a sinking feeling came over him. He was desperately tired after it all, almost too tired to keep up.

Nevertheless, he went after dinner and sprang it all on Severn.

'You damn fool!' said Severn, in consternation. 'What did you do it for?'

'Well,' said Jimmy, writhing. 'Because I *wanted* to.'

'Good God! The woman sounds like the head of Medusa. You're a hero of some stomach, I must say! Remember Clarissa?'

'Oh,' writhed Jimmy. 'But this is different.'

'Aye, her name's Emma, or something of that sort, isn't it?'

'Emily!' said Jimmy briefly.

'Well, you're a fool, anyway, so you may as well keep on acting in character. I've no doubt, by playing weeping-willow, you'll outlive all the female storms you ever prepare for yourself. I never yet did see a weeping-willow uprooted by a gale, so keep on hanging your harp on it, and you'll be all right. Here's luck! But for a man who was looking for a little Gretchen to adore him, you're a corker!'

Which was all that Severn had to say. But Jimmy went home with his knees shaking. On Sunday morning he wrote an anxious letter. He didn't know how to begin it: *Dear Mrs. Pinnegar* and *Dear Emily* seemed either too late in the day or too early. So he just plunged in, without dear anything.

'I want you to have this before you come. Perhaps we have

been precipitate. I only beg you to decide *finally*, for yourself before you come. Don't come, please, unless you are absolutely sure of yourself. If you are *in the least* unsure, wait awhile, wait till you are quite certain, one way or the other.

'For myself, if you don't come I shall understand. But please send me a telegram. If you do come, I shall welcome both you and the child. Yours ever – J. F.'

He paid a man his return fare, and three pounds extra, to go on the Sunday and deliver this letter.

The man came back in the evening. He had delivered the letter. There was no answer.

Awful Sunday night: tense Monday morning!

A telegram: '*Arrive Marylebone* 12.50 *with Jane. Yours ever. Emily.*'

Jimmy set his teeth and went to the station. But when he felt her looking at him, and so met her eyes; and after that saw her coming slowly down the platform, holding the child by the hand, her slow cat's eyes smouldering under her straight brows, smouldering at him: he almost swooned. A sickly grin came over him as he held out his hand. Nevertheless he said:

'I'm *awfully* glad you came.'

And as he sat in the taxi, a perverse but intense desire for her came over him, making him almost helpless. He could feel, so strongly, the presence of that other man about her, and this went to his head like neat spirits. That other man! In some subtle, inexplicable way, he was actually bodily present – the husband. The woman moved in his aura. She was hopelessly married to him.

And this went to Jimmy's head like neat whisky. Which of the two would fall before him with a greater fall – the woman, or the man, her husband?

The Fly[1]

BY KATHERINE MANSFIELD

'Y'ARE very snug in here,' piped old Mr. Woodifield, and he peered out of the great, green leather arm-chair by his friend, the boss's desk, as a baby peers out of its pram. His talk was over; it was time for him to be off. But he did not want to go. Since he had retired, since his . . . stroke, the wife and the girls kept him boxed up in the house every day of the week except Tuesday. On Tuesday he was dressed up and brushed and allowed to cut back to the City for the day. Though what he did there the wife and girls couldn't imagine. Made a nuisance of himself to his friends, they supposed. . . . Well, perhaps so. All the same, we cling to our last pleasures as the tree clings to its last leaves. So there sat old Woodifield, smoking a cigar and staring almost greedily at the boss, who rolled in his office chair, stout, rosy, five years older than he, and still going strong, still at the helm. It did one good to see him.

Wistfully, admiringly, the old voice added, 'It's snug in here, upon my word!'

'Yes, it's confortable enough,' agreed the boss, and he flipped *The Financial Times* with a paper-knife. As a matter of fact he was proud of his room; he liked to have it admired, especially by old Woodifield. It gave him a feeling of deep, solid satisfaction to be planted there in the midst of it in full view of that frail old figure in the muffler.

'I've had it done up lately,' he explained, as he had explained for the past – how many? – weeks. 'New carpet,' and he pointed to the bright red carpet with a pattern of large white rings. 'New furniture,' and he nodded towards the massive bookcase and the table with legs like twisted treacle. 'Electric heating!' He waved almost exultantly towards the five transparent, pearly sausages glowing so softly in the tilted copper pan.

But he did not draw old Woodifield's attention to the photo-

[1] From *The Dove's Nest*, by Katherine Mansfield, by permission of J. Middleton Murry and Messrs. Constable and Company, Ltd.

graph over the table of a grave-looking boy in uniform standing in one of those spectral photographers' parks with photographers' storm-clouds behind him. It was not new. It had been there for over six years.

'There was something I wanted to tell you,' said old Woodifield, and his eyes grew dim remembering. 'Now what was it? I had it in my mind when I started out this morning.' His hands began to tremble, and patches of red showed above his beard.

Poor old chap, he's on his last pins, thought the boss. And, feeling kindly, he winked at the old man, and said jokingly, 'I tell you what. I've got a little drop of something here that'll do you good before you go out into the cold again. It's beautiful stuff. It wouldn't hurt a child.' He took a key off his watch-chain, unlocked a cupboard below his desk, and drew forth a dark, squat bottle. 'That's the medicine,' said he. 'And the man from whom I got it told me on the strict Q.T. it came from the cellars at Windsor Castle.'

Old Woodifield's mouth fell open at the sight. He couldn't have looked more surprised if the boss had produced a rabbit.

'It's whisky, ain't it?' he piped, feebly.

The boss turned the bottle and lovingly showed him the label. Whisky it was.

'D'you know,' said he, peering up at the boss wonderingly, 'they won't let me touch it at home.' And he looked as though he was going to cry.

'Ah, that's where we know a bit more than the ladies,' cried the boss, swooping across for two tumblers that stood on the table with the water-bottle, and pouring a generous finger into each. 'Drink it down. It'll do you good. And don't put any water with it. It's sacrilege to tamper with stuff like this. Ah!' He tossed off his, pulled out his handkerchief, hastily wiped his moustaches, and cocked an eye at old Woodifield, who was rolling his in his chaps.

The old man swallowed, was silent a moment, and then said faintly, 'It's nutty!'

But it warmed him; it crept into his chill old brain – he remembered.

'That was it,' he said, heaving himself out of his chair. 'I thought you'd like to know. The girls were in Belgium last week having a look at poor Reggie's grave, and they happened to come across your boy's. They are quite near each other, it seems.'

Old Woodifield paused, but the boss made no reply. Only a quiver of his eyelids showed that he heard.

'The girls were delighted with the way the place is kept,' piped the old voice. 'Beautifully looked after. Couldn't be better if they were at home. You've not been across, have yer?'

'No, no!' For various reasons the boss had not been across.

'There's miles of it,' quavered old Woodifield, 'and it's all as neat as a garden. Flowers growing on all the graves. Nice broad paths.' It was plain from his voice how much he liked a nice broad path.

The pause came again. Then the old man brightened wonderfully.

'D'you know what the hotel made the girls pay for a pot of jam?' he piped. 'Ten francs! Robbery, I call it. It was a little pot, so Gertrude says, no bigger than a half-crown. And she hadn't taken more than a spoonful when they charged her ten francs. Gertrude brought the pot away with her to teach 'em a lesson. Quite right, too; it's trading on our feelings. They think because we're over there having a look around we're ready to pay anything. That's what it is.' And he turned towards the door.

'Quite right, quite right!' cried the boss, though what was quite right he hadn't the least idea. He came round by his desk, followed the shuffling footsteps to the door, and saw the old fellow out. Woodifield was gone.

For a long moment the boss stayed, staring at nothing, while the grey-haired office messenger, watching him, dodged in and out of his cubby-hole like a dog that expects to be taken for a run: 'I'll see nobody for half an hour, Macey,' said the boss. 'Understand? Nobody at all.'

'Very good, sir.'

The door shut, the firm, heavy steps recrossed the bright carpet, the fat body plumped down in the spring chair, and leaning forward, the boss covered his face with his hands. He wanted, he intended, he had arranged to weep. . . .

It had been a terrible shock to him when old Woodifield sprang that remark upon him about the boy's grave. It was exactly as though the earth had opened and he had seen the boy lying there with Woodifield's girls staring down at him. For it was strange. Although over six years had passed away, the boss never thought of the boy except as lying unchanged, unblemished in his uniform, asleep for ever. 'My son!' groaned the boss. But no tears came yet. In the past, in the first months and even years after the boy's death, he had only to say those words to be overcome by such grief that nothing short of a violent fit of weeping could relieve him. Time, he had declared then, he had told everybody, could make no difference. Other men perhaps might recover, might live their loss down, but not he. How was it possible? His boy was an only son. Ever since his birth the boss had worked at building up this business for him; it had no other meaning if it was not for the boy. Life itself had come to have no other meaning. How on earth could he have slaved, denied himself, kept going all those years without the promise for ever before him of the boy's stepping into his shoes and carrying on where he left off?

And that promise had been so near being fulfilled. The boy had been in the office learning the ropes for a year before the war. Every morning they had started off together; they had come back by the same train. And what congratulations he had received as the boy's father! No wonder; he had taken to it marvellously. As to his popularity with the staff, every man jack of them down to old Macey couldn't make enough of the boy. And he wasn't in the least spoiled. No, he was just his bright, natural self, with the right word for everybody, with that boyish look and his habit of saying, 'Simply splendid!'

But all that was over and done with as though it never had been. The day had come when Macey had handed him the telegram that brought the whole place crashing about his head. 'Deeply regret to inform you . . .' And he had left the office a broken man, with his life in ruins.

Six years ago, six years . . . How quickly time passed! It might have happened yesterday. The boss took his hands from his face; he was puzzled. Something seemed to be wrong with

him. He wasn't feeling as he wanted to feel. He decided to get up and have a look at the boy's photograph. But it wasn't a favourite photograph of his; the expression was unnatural. It was cold, even stern-looking. The boy had never looked like that.

At that moment the boss noticed that a fly had fallen into his broad inkpot, and was trying feebly but desperately to clamber out again. Help! help! said those struggling legs. But the sides of the inkpot were wet and slippery; it fell back again and began to swim. The boss took up a pen, picked the fly out of the ink, and shook it on to a piece of blotting-paper. For a fraction of a second it lay still on the dark patch that oozed round it. Then the front legs waved, took hold, and, pulling its small sodden body up it began the immense task of cleaning the ink from its wings. Over and under, over and under, went a leg along a wing, as the stone goes over and under the scythe. Then there was a pause, while the fly, seeming to stand on the tips of its toes, tried to expand first one wing and then the other. It succeeded at last, and, sitting down, it began, like a minute cat, to clean its face. Now one could imagine that the little front legs rubbed against each other lightly, joyfully. The horrible danger was over; it had escaped; it was ready for life again.

But just then the boss had an idea. He plunged his pen back into the ink, leaned his thick wrist on the blotting-paper, and as the fly tried its wings down came a great heavy blot. What would it make of that? What indeed! The little beggar seemed absolutely cowed, stunned, and afraid to move because of what would happen next. But then, as if painfully, it dragged itself forward. The front legs waved, caught hold, and, more slowly this time, the task began from the beginning.

He's a plucky little devil, thought the boss, and he felt a real admiration for the fly's courage. That was the way to tackle things; that was the right spirit. Never say die; it was only a question of . . . But the fly had again finished its laborious task, and the boss had just time to refill his pen, to shake fair and square on the new-cleaned body yet another dark drop. What about it this time? A painful moment of suspense followed. But behold, the front legs were again waving; the boss felt a rush of relief.

He leaned over the fly and said to it tenderly, 'You artful little b. . . .' And he actually had the brilliant notion of breathing on it to help the drying process. All the same, there was something timid and weak about its efforts now, and the boss decided that this time should be the last, as he dipped the pen into the inkpot.

It was. The last blot fell on the soaked blotting-paper, and the draggled fly lay in it and did not stir. The back legs were stuck to the body; the front legs were not to be seen.

'Come on,' said the boss. 'Look sharp!' And he stirred it with his pen – in vain. Nothing happened or was likely to happen. The fly was dead.

The boss lifted the corpse on the end of the paper-knife and flung it into the waste-paper basket, but such a grinding feeling of wretchedness seized him that he felt positively frightened. He started forward and pressed the bell for Macey.

'Bring me some fresh blotting-paper,' he said, sternly, 'and look sharp about it.' And while the old dog padded away he fell to wondering what it was he had been thinking about before. What was it? It was . . . He took out his handkerchief and passed it inside his collar. For the life of him he could not remember.

The Taipan [1]

BY W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM

No one knew better than he that he was an important person. He was number one in not the least important branch of the most important English firm in China. He had worked his way up through solid ability and he looked back with a faint smile at the callow clerk who had come out to China thirty years before. When he remembered the modest home he had come from, a little red house in a long row of little red houses, in Barnes, a suburb which, aiming desperately at the genteel, achieves only a sordid melancholy, and compared it with the magnificent stone mansion, with its wide verandas and spacious rooms, which was at once the office of the company and his own residence, he chuckled with satisfaction.

He had come a long way since then. He thought of the high tea to which he sat down when he came home from school (he was at St. Paul's), with his father and mother and his two sisters, a slice of cold meat, a great deal of bread and butter and plenty of milk in his tea, everybody helping himself, and then he thought of the state in which now he ate his evening meal. He always dressed and whether he was alone or not he expected the three boys to wait at table. His number one boy knew exactly what he liked and he never had to bother himself with the details of housekeeping; but he always had a set dinner with soup and fish, entrée, roast, sweet and savoury, so that if he wanted to ask anyone in at the last moment he could. He liked his food and he did not see why when he was alone he should have less good a dinner than when he had had a guest.

He had indeed gone far. That was why he did not care to go home now, he had not been to England for ten years, and he took his leave in Japan or Vancouver where he was sure of meeting old friends from the China coast. He knew no one at home. His sisters had married in their own station, their husbands were

[1] From *On a Chinese Screen*, by W. Somerset Maugham, by permission of Messrs. William Heinemann, Ltd.

clerks and their sons were clerks; there was nothing between him and them; they bored him. He satisfied the claims of relationship by sending them every Christmas a piece of fine silk, some elaborate embroidery, or a case of tea. He was not a mean man, and as long as his mother lived he had made her an allowance. But when the time came for him to retire he had no intention of going back to England, he had seen too many men do that and he knew how often it was a failure; he meant to take a house near the race-course in Shanghai: what with bridge and his ponies and golf he expected to get through the rest of his life very comfortably. But he had a good many years before he need think of retiring. In another five or six Higgins would be going home and then he would take charge of the head office in Shanghai. Meanwhile he was very happy where he was, he could save money, which you couldn't do in Shanghai, and have a good time into the bargain. This place had another advantage over Shanghai: he was the most prominent man in the community and what he said went. Even the consul took care to keep on the right side of him. Once a consul and he had been at loggerheads and it was not he who had gone to the wall. The taipan thrust out his jaw pugnaciously as he thought of the incident.

But he smiled, for he felt in an excellent humour. He was walking back to his office from a capital luncheon at the Hong-Kong and Shanghai Bank. They did you very well there. The food was first rate and there was plenty of liquor. He had started with a couple of cocktails, then he had some excellent sauterne and he finished up with two glasses of port and some fine old brandy. He felt good. And when he left he did a thing that was rare with him; he walked. His bearers with his chair kept a few paces behind him in case he felt inclined to slip into it, but he enjoyed stretching his legs. He did not get enough exercise these days. Now that he was too heavy to ride it was difficult to get exercise. But if he was too heavy to ride he could still keep ponies, and as he strolled along in the balmy air he thought of the spring meeting. He had a couple of griffins that he had hopes of and one of the lads in his office had turned out a fine jockey (he must see they didn't sneak him away – old Higgins in Shanghai would give

a pot of money to get him over there) and he ought to pull off two or three races. He flattered himself that he had the finest stable in the city. He pouted his broad chest like a pigeon. It was a beautiful day, and good to be alive.

He paused as he came to the cemetery. It stood there, neat and orderly, as an evident sign of the community's opulence. He never passed the cemetery without a little glow of pride. He was pleased to be an Englishman. For the cemetery stood in a place, valueless when it was chosen, which with the increase of the city's affluence was now worth a great deal of money. It had been suggested that the graves should be moved to another spot and the land sold for building, but the feeling of the community was against it. It gave the taipan a sense of satisfaction to think that their dead rested on the most valuable site on the island. It showed that there were things they cared for more than money. Money be blowed! When it came to 'the things that mattered' (this was a favourite phrase with the taipan), well, one remembered that money wasn't everything.

And now he thought he would take a stroll through. He looked at the graves. They were neatly kept and the pathways were free from weeds. There was a look of prosperity. And as he sauntered along he read the names on the tombstones. Here were three side by side; the captain, the first mate, and the second mate of the barque *Mary Baxter* who had all perished together in the typhoon of 1908. He remembered it well. There was a little group of two missionaries, their wives and children, who had been massacred during the Boxer troubles. Shocking thing that had been. Not that he took much stock in missionaries; but, hang it all, one couldn't have these damned Chinese massacring them. Then he came to a cross with a name on it he knew. Good chap, Edward Mulock, but he couldn't stand his liquor, drank himself to death, poor devil; at twenty-five the taipan had known a lot of them do that; there were several more neat crosses with a man's name on them and the age, twenty-five, twenty-six, or twenty-seven; it was always the same story; they had come out to China: they had never seen so much money before, they were good fellows and they wanted to drink with the rest: they couldn't stand it, and there

they were in the cemetery. You had to have a strong head and a fine constitution to drink drink for drink on the China coast. Of course it was very sad, but the taipan could hardly help a smile when he thought how many of those young fellows he had drunk underground. And there was a death that had been useful, a fellow in his own firm, senior to him and a clever chap, too: if that fellow had lived he might not have been taipan now. Truly the ways of fate were inscrutable. Ah, and here was little Mrs. Turner, Violet Turner, she had been a pretty little thing, he had had quite an affair with her; he had been devilish cut up when she died. He looked at her age on the tombstone. She'd be no chicken if she were alive now. And as he thought of all those dead people a sense of satisfaction spread through him. He had beaten them all. They were dead and he was alive, and by George, he'd scored them off. His eyes collected in one picture all those crowded graves and he smiled scornfully. He very nearly rubbed his hands.

'No one ever thought I was a fool,' he muttered.

He had a feeling of good-natured contempt for the gibbering dead. Then, as he strolled along, he came suddenly upon two coolies digging a grave. He was astonished, for he had not heard that anyone in the community was dead.

'Who the devil's that for?' he said aloud.

The coolies did not even look at him, they went on with their work, standing in the grave, deep down, and they shovelled up heavy clods of earth. Though he had been so long in China he knew no Chinese, in his day it was not thought necessary to learn the damned language, and he asked the coolies in English whose grave they were digging. They did not understand. They answered him in Chinese and he cursed them for ignorant fools. He knew that Mrs. Broome's child was ailing and it might have died, but he would certainly have heard of it, and, besides, that wasn't a child's grave, it was a man's, and a big man's, too. It was uncanny. He wished he hadn't gone into that cemetery; he hurried out and stepped into his chair. His good humour had all gone and there was an uneasy frown on his face. The moment he got back to his office he called to his number two:

'I say, Peters, who's dead, d'you know?'

But Peters knew nothing. The taipan was puzzled. He called one of the native clerks and sent him to the cemetery to ask the coolies. He began to sign his letters. The clerk came back and said the coolies had gone and there was no one to ask. The taipan began to feel vaguely annoyed: he did not like things to happen of which he knew nothing. His own boy would know, his boy always knew everything, and he sent for him; but the boy had heard of no death in the community.

'I knew no one was dead,' said the taipan irritably. 'But what's the grave for?'

He told the boy to go to the overseer of the cemetery and find out what the devil he had dug a grave for when no one was dead.

'Let me have a whisky and soda before you go,' he added, as the boy was leaving the room.

He did not know why the sight of the grave had made him uncomfortable. But he tried to put it out of his mind. He felt better when he had drunk the whisky, and he finished his work. He went upstairs and turned over the pages of *Punch*. In a few minutes he would go to the club and play a rubber or two of bridge before dinner. But it would ease his mind to hear what his boy had to say and he waited for his return. In a little while the boy came back and he brought the overseer with him.

'What are you having a grave dug for?' he asked the overseer point blank. 'Nobody's dead.'

'I no dig glave,' said the man.

'What the devil do you mean by that? There were two coolies digging a grave this afternoon.'

The two Chinese looked at one another. Then the boy said they had been to the cemetery together. There was no new grave there.

The taipan only just stopped himself from speaking.

'But damn it all, I saw it myself,' were the words on the tip of his tongue.

But he did not say them. He grew very red as he choked them down. The two Chinese looked at him with their steady eyes. For a moment his breath failed him.

'All right. Get out,' he gasped.

But as soon as they were gone he shouted for the boy again, and when he came, maddeningly impassive, he told him to bring some whisky. He rubbed his sweating face with a handkerchief. His hand trembled when he lifted the glass to his lips. They could say what they liked, but he had seen the grave. Why, he could still hear the dull thud as the coolies threw the spadefuls of earth on the ground above them. What did it mean? He could feel his heart beating. He felt strangely ill at ease. But he pulled himself together. It was all nonsense. If there was no grave there it must have been an hallucination. The best thing he could do was to go to the club, and if he ran across the doctor he would ask him to give him a look over.

Everyone in the club looked just the same as ever. He did not know why he should have expected them to look different. It was a comfort. These men, living for many years with one another lives that were methodically regulated, had acquired a number of little idiosyncrasies – one of them hummed incessantly while he played bridge, another insisted on drinking beer through a straw – and these tricks which had so often irritated the taipan now gave him a sense of security. He needed it, for he could not get out of his head that strange sight he had seen; he played bridge very badly; his partner was censorious, and the taipan lost his temper. He thought the men were looking at him oddly. He wondered what they saw in him that was unaccustomed. Suddenly he felt he could not bear to stay in the club any longer. As he went out he saw the doctor reading *The Times* in the reading-room, but he could not bring himself to speak to him. He wanted to see for himself whether that grave was really there and stepping into his chair he told his bearers to take him to the cemetery. You couldn't have an hallucination twice, could you? And besides, he would take the overseer in with him and if the grave was not there he wouldn't see it, and if it was he'd give the overseer the soundest thrashing he'd ever had. But the overseer was nowhere to be found. He had gone out and taken the keys with him. When the taipan found he could not get into the cemetery he felt suddenly exhausted. He got back into his chair and told his bearers to take him home. He would lie down for half an hour before dinner. He

was tired out. That was it. He had heard that people had hallucinations when they were tired. When his boy came in to put out his clothes for dinner it was only by an effort of will that he got up. He had a strong inclination not to dress that evening, but he resisted it; he made it a rule to dress, he had dressed every evening for twenty years and it would never do to break his rule. But he ordered a bottle of champagne with his dinner and that made him feel more comfortable. Afterwards he told the boy to bring him the best brandy. When he had drunk a couple of glasses of this he felt himself again. Hallucinations be damned! He went to the billiard-room and practised a few difficult shots. There could not be much the matter with him when his eye was so sure. When he went to bed he sank immediately into a sound sleep.

But suddenly he awoke. He had dreamed of that open grave and the coolies digging leisurely. He was sure he had seen them. It was absurd to say it was an hallucination when he had seen them with his own eyes. Then he heard the rattle of the night watchman going his rounds. It broke upon the stillness of the night so harshly that it made him jump out of his skin. And then terror seized him. He felt a horror of the winding multitudinous streets of the Chinese city, and there was something ghastly and terrible in the convoluted roofs of the temples with their devils grimacing and tortured. He loathed the smells that assaulted his nostrils. And the people. Those myriads of blue-clad coolies, and the beggars in their filthy rags, and the merchants and the magistrates, sleek, smiling, and inscrutable, in their long black gowns. They seemed to press upon him with menace. He hated the country. China. Why had he ever come? He was panic-stricken now. He must get out. He would not stay another year, another month. What did he care about Shanghai?

'Oh, my God!' he cried, 'if I were only safely back in England.'

He wanted to go home. If he had to die he wanted to die in England. He could not bear to be buried among all these yellow men, with their slanting eyes and their grinning faces. He wanted to be buried at home, not in that grave he had seen that day. He could never rest there. Never. What did it matter what people

thought? Let them think what they liked. The only thing that mattered was to get away while he had the chance.

He got out of bed and wrote to the head of the firm and said he had discovered he was dangerously ill. He must be replaced. He could not stay longer than was absolutely necessary. He must go home at once.

They found the letter in the morning clenched in the taipan's hand. He had slipped down between the desk and the chair. He was stone dead.

Stripes[1]

BY ETHEL COLBURN MAYNE

THE little hat-box would be big enough, since clothes intended for a jumble-sale need not be packed with care. And they could have the hat-box, too. The last time Bell had taken it upon a visit with her, both the straps had broken, worn with age; and when the chauffeur took it down, he only just saved the whole thing from upsetting on the doorstep. For the key was lost, of course; Bell never could keep keys. She'd have to buy a new box; her old friend must go. How many hats, how many Bells, that box had known! Some one would buy it for a song and have it made as good as new. At jumble-sales they bought your mendable unmended things, and salved your conscience for you.

In the heaps that strewed the floor and bed, there lay a dozen left-off Bells. Bell smiled at her old selves; and now from out of the wardrobe came a blouse in blue and white striped muslin. As she drew it from the hanger, Bell stopped smiling. But she did not stop her humming of a song – the 'Linden-Tree' of Schubert. Bell went on with that; she knew that she went on with it.

The blouse had been a favourite, yet she had worn it very little. It had broad blue stripes, black-edged – narrow black lines which made the blue-and-white peculiarly becoming; and a tiny collar of black satin lay upon one's neck below the nape, not coming round at all. Half-blouse, half-jumper – very clever; always at that 'salon' Bell could find the sort of things she liked.

She had forgotten . . . well, at any rate that it was here. And now that it was in her hands Bell's eyes shut quickly, first against the blouse, and then against the day when last she wore it.

She should never have put on that blouse with a striped skirt. But the right skirt had shed a fastener. She had meant to find one after lunch and sew it on and change. Then something came by lunch-time post which needed answering at once; she had delayed to change, and sat down in the drawing-room to write her letter.

[1] From *Inner Circle*, by Ethel Colburn Mayne, by permission of Messrs. Constable and Company, Ltd.

Hair a little tumbled too; and hands – poor London hands! Only the time since breakfast; but knuckles look so knotty when they're even slightly soiled. Who would have come at such an hour? Not anyone but he, and he had never come at such an hour before.

To meet the blow like that was bitter luck. The rest was more than luck; if you were feeling grandiose you'd call it fate. But to be caught untidy had been just bad luck. How often, since, Bell had imagined having had her yellow muslin frock on, and her hair and hands all right! It wouldn't have changed anything – except perhaps the way she had gone under. Hopeless. There wasn't anything to do, nor anything that signified to say; but in her yellow frock she might have. . . .

I have something very difficult to say to you. Oh, Bell, sit up and face it. But how can I, with my hair and hands like this, and two striped garments on that don't belong? *I'm going to be married very soon.* And in the yellow muslin frock she clasped two slim bright hands upon her lap and lifted up a smooth bright head and faced it splendidly. But in the two striped things, with knotty-knuckled hands . . . Nowhere to look but in her lap, or in his face.

The little blouse was crisp and fresh. It had been then; no good, with all the rest; but it had been, and it was now. For Bell had stretched it on this very hanger when she took it off that evening. When it had fallen from her, some of the shame had seemed to fall away with it. Never again! – yet she had put it by as carefully as if she ever could. Not crushed, the little blouse? Bell's eyes were open now. No, little blouse; not you.

Was it too good to put into a jumble-sale? Would Nancy take it! Nancy didn't 'know'; but if she did, she wouldn't like to wear the vesture of one's pain. Unfair to let one's sister do a thing she would abhor to do. Well, anyhow, this must be packed with care – a separate cardboard box.

Bell hummed the Schubert song while she filled out the sleeves with tissue-paper. Thoughts were fluttering about her like the moths that were not there because of the red tablet thing she used instead of napthalin (no smell). Pale tiny moths – you had to

crush them when they *were* there; nothing could excuse you if you didn't, they were so destructive. Such a little, little pinch of dust! Thoughts could be crushed like that; and it had been while some one sang 'The Linden-Tree' in the warm, smoky concert-hall that they had turned and looked in one another's eyes, and known that they were lovers. For a long while Bell had feared that song; then one day she had heard it without warning. Something fluttered up in her; she could not crush it then. But since, the wistful cadences . . . She taught herself to hum them absently when they occurred to her. You had to crush the fluttering pale moths – a little pinch of dust.

Well-packed! Some pretty girl would covet it. There'd be a rush for anything so good and so immaculate. A blouse like that for, say, three shillings! Helping at the Sale, one might contrive to keep it for a pretty girl, and wish her better luck with it.

★

The women surged into the hall. Few pretty girls, but many girls. Dowdy or showy; sometimes, inexplicably, both. And eager; hostile, but eager, knowing all about the 'styles,' scorning the hats especially. The hats were awful. Everyone sent such wrecks.

The girls had eagle-eyes, and no illusions. They restrained their meeker mothers. 'That thing! Why, it's filthy! Look – you'd never get it clean."

Gladys might giggle, but Irene took it hard. 'This fur? I'd rather wear a tom-cat round my neck. He'd smell no worse!' Her young eyes blasted all the women selling. Yes, she had to *come* – there might be something she could do with; but she never would forgive these women.

Bell was afraid to speak to her, or any of the girls. She would have felt as they felt; she would have known as they knew that the sellers wore their oldest clothes on purpose. Timidly she met their eyes; when they passed on disdainfully, she felt relieved. The pretty girl had not appeared. Perhaps she never would; and Bell decided that the blouse must be displayed. She had been hiding it for the imagined blue-eyed, black-lashed girl who was to have that better luck with it.

Just as she set it forth, she saw before her stall – not the Imagined, but a girl who differed from the rest in that, besides her mother, a young man was with her. Not one other man was there, and this man wished *he* wasn't, very evidently. He was dark and short, yet graceful – fiery and lithe in movement. Brown eyes, quick and clear, took in the scene; a small close mouth twitched angrily. Bell, watching him, reflected (as she often had before) that men like him were in a way more interesting than the men she knew, because they had to 'do it all themselves' – to make their characters without much help from anybody else. No training, no tradition; only their own intelligence and impulse. This one looked like a salesman in the silk department of some first-rate shop. Buying from him, you'd notice him; and he would be aware that you had noticed him. A sort of half-confessed relation would spring up. But then the jargon of his calling which, no matter how intelligent, he had to speak, would put you off; you'd feel annoyed at having let him see that he had interested you. Girls of his own sort, though, would not be put off by the jargon. All would be right for them, and he would have no end of other things to say, outside the shop.

Observing this man's girl, Bell thought: 'She's very much in love with him, and she's afraid. He's cross with her sometimes; he's clever and ill-tempered. She can be easily upset and shocked. She doesn't like to be so much in love – she never thought she would be, and it vexes her.'

The girl was almost pretty. Everything was passable except her nose. Her nose was sharp and pink. 'Powder,' thought Bell. 'Why doesn't she wear powder!' But this girl disdained it, one could guess. For she was priggish-looking – very slim and still; pale with that little glittering pink nose between the low-set cheeks: blue-eyed, fair-haired, fair-lashed. 'Fair lashes can be fetching, but hers aren't.' Though a full rosy mouth put up a fight against the rest it seldom won. 'Y.W.C.A., and he is not Y.M., I'm sure!'

He took her coolly, but he liked her 'style'; and in her priggish way, she *had* a style. Clad in a long dark coat, well buttoned-up, and with a buttoned, untrimmed collar to her chin, she tacitly

reproved the open-necked Irene and the feather-boa-ed Gladys. On her fair head sat a dark-blue toque with ribbon-trimming only. Fabric gloves of London grey, and sober shoes of blacking-leather (with black stockings of no kind of 'silk' at all) completed an effect, which clearly was intentional, of no attempt at any grandeurs, since she could not have the real thing.

Incorruptible – and yet one saw at moments the kept-under Eve to whom the rosy mouth belonged. Before Bell set the muslin blouse beneath her eyes, she had been tempted once or twice. A black-and-white check pleated skirt, a short black coat that went with it; on these she paused.

'That style would suit me.'

But the young man frowned, and she abandoned them.

Her mother whispered: 'Flo does fancy checks.'

She was so different from Flo that one could 'see' the father – who was dead, for she wore widow's weeds. From him the girl derived, all but the rosy mouth whose ruins one could trace upon the mother's soft red countenance. Her flabby jollity had had its tussle with the husband and the daughter, but survived. She feared and worshipped Flo; Flo's man she feared, without the worship. He disliked her openly. Bell saw his mouth contract when he was told that Flo did fancy checks. That settled it! He wasn't going to be bidden by a mother-in-law; he would put down his foot at once.

'Well, dear, when Victor's making you a birthday present,' said the mother, whispering again, '*I* say you should consult his taste.'

Flo bit her lip. 'Mother! We don't want everyone to know.' And Bell was everyone, most miserably. But she took her courage in both hands, and in both hands held out the blouse.

'I think you'd wear this well.'

She felt the phrase was gratifying. What they said in first-rate houses, Flo divined. Her blue eyes, holding still a gleam of anger at her mother's clumsiness, examined the blue blouse.

'It's pretty,' she said slowly.

'And as fresh as paint!' the mother cried.

Flo took the blouse from Bell. 'I don't see anything to hold the waist – how does a person keep it tidy? I suppose that's why –'

But Bell broke in. 'There isn't anything; there never was. It comes outside the skirt.'

'It's not a jumper,' said the girl, suspiciously. But Victor knew.

'Oh, that's all right. We've had that style.'

'You wear it loose,' Bell eagerly explained. 'And it hangs over charmingly in front – a straight, short line.'

'Flo, try it on! You could slip off your coat,' the mother urged. 'It wouldn't hurt the blouse,' she said to Bell.

'Of course it won't,' said Bell. 'Do try it on.'

But Victor frowned again. 'The sloppy styles don't suit you.'

'That's all you know!' the girl returned, with her first smile. 'You've never seen me sloppy, as you call it.' For the rosy mouth was winning this time; Flo was captivated by the blouse.

She took her coat off. What was beneath had not been visible till then. A plain white blouse of cotton crêpe, and a striped skirt.

Bell flushed as if with sudden pain. Remembered pain; and a new pain as well – a queer solicitude. . . . Play Providence; stop Flo from letting Victor buy the blouse for her! What does it signify to me? But Flo's thin face with its young, fixed austerity that yet was capable, Bell thought, of dwindling into wistfulness – Flo's face appealed to Bell. Flo would fight life as hard as life fought her; but how she would have liked to be the sort that needn't fight, at any rate, a little rosy mouth! She, like her man, had made herself a character. She used it with her mother; used it with her Victor too, and often wanted not to. How she was wishing, now, that she could buy the blouse herself, and make him see how well it suited her! But he was giving her a birthday-present; Victor's taste must be consulted.

Why did he buy it here – why didn't he buy something new? Most likely Flo had done this as an acid test for Victor. If he would come and choose the present here, she would accept it – 'not unless.' The sort of thing she *would* do!

Victor had stood the test, but he resented it. It made him look a fool, and mean into the bargain. And he couldn't bear her mother. Victor might yet prove faithless. *I have something very difficult to say to you.* How would a Victor put it? How would a Flo face that – which would prevail, the summer mouth, the

winter eyes? Flo wouldn't have a fastener off her skirt – the right skirt or the wrong one; Flo would do every needle-job without delay. But would that save her in the hour –

The blouse was on. Did the black-framed blue stripes and the alluring little collar on the nape do all for Flo that they had done for Bell before that day? Bell couldn't look to see. The two striped things . . . 'I'll have the blouse,' she heard Flo say. 'How much is it?'

'Fifteen-and-sixpence,' faltered Bell.

'*Fifteen-and-sixpence!*'

'Well, you see, it's absolutely new, and it had cost three guineas.'

'Why did the lady send it here, I wonder!' cried the mother, shrilly.

'It was mine,' said Bell. 'I –'

'Wore it once or twice, and then got tired of it. Oh, I'll send it to the Jumble-Sale and get a price! – that's charity!' Soft scarlet mother was in arms for Flo.

Flo said: 'For goodness' sake be quiet, mother.' Then she took off the blouse and looked at Bell. The summer mouth, but not the winter eyes, was pleading; 'Make it less!'

But Bell saw the two striped things. 'I – I didn't fix the prices,' Bell said, pleading, too.

'Here, never mind the damage!' Victor cried. 'Have it.' He plunged a hand into his pocket. 'Then we can get out.'

Flo, with her eyes like lightning, uttered: 'No!'

'Lord, what's the matter now?'

She didn't answer him; she walked away. Her mother, quivering still with anger, whispered (but Bell could hear): 'You've hurt her feelings, Victor. You forgot. *You* weren't to pay till we were home.'

'Feelings – I'm fair fed up with feelings! Coming to a place like this. . . . Here, let's get out.' He proffered a pound note. Bell did not take it; she was gazing where Flo stood. As if Flo knew, she turned and came back to the stall – pale, chill again, but resolute.

'I won't have that. It isn't worth the money. . . . Thank you, madam. . . . Come along.'

They left the hall. Bell heard the mother saying as they went: 'Well, that one has a nerve!'

'Twelve shillings and sixpence for Flo's better luck!' thought Bell, as she put back the blouse among the things that all were listed at three shillings. 'Mother is right. I have a nerve.'

And nerves were like the fluttering pale moths, and like the thoughts. Next time, she musn't care. Skirts should be plain or striped – she'd have no nerve.

Picnic[1]

BY JOHN METCALFE

I

'THAT was a flash then, see it?'

The youth and the girl had risen from the bracken and waited for the peal of thunder.

Presently it reached them, hardly a peal in fact, only as yet a sort of flat and muffled bump, as though some monstrous troll had jarred his wooden trencher on the far horizon-rim. The curious, silent shudder of the air that followed had passed next moment, like the giant's breath, to lose itself along the leafy tunnels of the wood, but in its wake arose on every hand an urgent whispering of trees and the affrighted danger-cries of little birds.

'Damn!' said the boy. He was tallish, a small-boned, narrow-shouldered lad, some eighteen years of age. His face, good-looking in a facile, undistinguished style, was marred by a loose mouth and eyes too closely set. He wore a tennis-shirt, and round his waist a purple kammabund.

By his side the girl, Edie Copping, had begun to cry. 'Oh, Elge,' she said, 'I do hate storms. They do make me feel rotten.'

Early that morning Edie and her sister Ruth, and Alge and Alge's cronies, Bert and Jim, had started out with Mr. Meggeson the curate and a score or more of others for the woods. It was the annual summer outing of St. Saviour's 'Social and Endeavour,' and they had come by motor char-à-banc. After a noisy lunch of lemonade and sandwiches procured at the hut beside the lake, Mr. Meggeson had given word to scatter.

Edie and Alge had wandered far. From where they rested on their heather-scented couch they could no longer hear the shouts of their companions. Somewhere behind their heads a drowsy bee had buzzed. The afternoon had lapped them in its lazy warmth, and in the serving of those golden moments they had lost count of time. Only the sudden ominous darkening of the sky had roused them from their dream.

[1] From *The Smoking Leg*, published by Messrs. Jarrolds Ltd.

About them, in the little fern-floored glade, were visible the accessories and souvenirs of dalliance. Under a bush Alge could make out the empty bottles and the crumpled paper bag which he had thrown away an hour or more ago. Nearer, some cigarette ends and a heap of orange peel still marked the spot where they had sat and smoked and squeezed before retreating to the deeper shadows of the thicket's edge. Over there the yielding bracken still retained the impress of their bodies, and resting side by side between the twisted ankles of an oak, there lay like scandalous stage properties his silver-mounted cane and Edie's powder-box and puff.

He strode forward to pick them up, and as he did so came a second flash and then once more that curious susurration of the upper air. 'Eight seconds,' he pronounced, proceeding towards the oak-tree after his pause to count: 'It's still a long way off. It mayn't come here at all.'

As if to answer him the fronting silhouette of trees leaped forwards, stamped its instantaneous pattern on the ground, and then as suddenly retreated. Next moment thunder grumbled sourly round a distant ring of hills.

'Oo, Elge, it's getting nearer. It is.'

He had returned from the oak-tree and held out her powder-box and puff.

'Here, catch hold,' he said. 'Better get along out of this. Better get yourself tidy too. Come on.'

Together, then, they hurried from the glade, whilst high above their heads the wrath of heaven gathered. She would have run, but he, with a restraining hand upon her arm, prevented her. About them little dusty flocks of fallen leaves fled scampering in a hollow wind, and all around the boughs and stems of trees were labouring.

Edie still cried. Her head and throat were burning and her body shook with intermittent sobs. Alge could feel the trembling of her fingers on his coat-sleeve, but held his glance averted.

Suddenly she stopped and spoke. 'I'm frightened. Oh, I feel so frightened.'

They faced each other. The rushing wind had dropped, and

in the hush that followed it were audible the last low pipings of the birds, held to a single faint, half-stifled note of fear. Presently these sounds also died away and all the forest waited breathless for the coming storm.

'We're all right, Edie. It's under single trees that's dangerous.'

'It isn't only that. Oh, Elge, it isn't only that I mean. You know . . .'

She faltered, paused a moment, and continued:

'You know, you promised, Elge. You promised to stick by me.'

He regarded her uneasily. Clearing his throat he made as if to speak, then checked a half-embarrassed snigger. Into his glance there crept a look of troubled calculation, presently of apprehension.

The girl was clinging to him now with both hands round his neck. Above them, heavy with the imminence of rain, the sky had beetled like a frowning face.

'Oh, shut it, Edie. Everything's all right. I promise you it is. Let go my neck.'

He tried to unloose her hands.

'Let go,' he said. . . .

A sudden passion of resentment blazed between them. The tense, electric air had held their nerves astretch, but now pent-up emotion had its way. They railed like angry children, scarce knowing what they said.

'That's right, Elge; that's the way with fellows. Get round a girl and lead her into wrong and then "Let go," they say.'

'My God, you girls!'

'You know you planned it all along. That's why you was so glad when Mr. Meggeson says "Break." That's why –'

'And so was you, you tart! You wanted it as bad as me, you know you did. Let go my neck, I say.'

She released her grasp so suddenly that he reeled backwards, catching at a branch. The girl had sunk upon her knees, hysterically sobbing.

Alge ran his fingers tenderly around his neck.

'Come on,' he muttered sulkily. 'It's going to pelt. I'm going

to the hut. The others'll be there by this and wondering where we've got to. Come along, Edie.'

'You cad!' she said.

He eyed her nervously. His face was white. 'I'm going,' he repeated, but she made no move.

'All right,' he said. 'I'm off. Not going to wait here to get soaked and struck. Let you get on with it.'

She raised her eyes.

'You cad!' she said again.

'I'm not. Why don't you come?'

'Along of you? I wouldn't be seen dead!'

'You fool! It's your fault just as much as mine.'

'It wasn't.'

'Yes, it was. You –'

He stopped that moment, for a sudden, searing flash that seemed to rive the sky blinded their eyes and drove recrimination back upon their lips. Next instant, with a deafening report, the storm had broken on them in its fury.

They ran then, plunging through brake and thicket, stumbling down paths grown darker every moment. The rain came on just as they reached a little clearing and by the time they crossed it they were drenched.

They made, so far as memory might guide them, for the refreshment hut where they had bought their lemonade and sandwiches three hours ago. At intervals Alge uttered a forlorn halloo.

After a time the downpour became less torrential, but overhead the mighty din went on without a pause. The lightning now was almost continuous. It gave them curious momentary visions of a whelmed and stricken world – the drenched and spouting leaves, the shining trunks of trees, long, streaming vistas that fled headlong through a glittering sea of ink, drowned paths that slid away to regions more tormented yet.

Alge felt the touch of Edie's hand upon his shoulder. She shouted in his ear: 'I can't run any more.' Next instant she had sunk exhausted at his feet.

He tried in vain to raise her. She seemed too tired and too terrified to move. Her arms were scratched and bleeding and her

flimsy summer clothes were torn. She drew his head down to her lips and whispered: 'We're going to get struck. It serves us right. We're going to get struck.'

Between the flashes it was dark, but not too dark for him to see her face. Something in its expression puzzled and dismayed him. Her eyes were large and feverishly bright. Her mouth was set to a straight line. She lay inert and terrified, and yet in the abandon of her pose was something curiously more than terror or despair. In some obscure and contradictory fashion it conveyed a hint of triumph.

He raised himself and frowned. For a moment he puckered his lips as to a hesitating whistle. His jaw dropped and his gaze grew plaintive.

2

Perhaps an hour had passed. For more than half of that time Edie had remained as she had fallen, resisting every effort on the part of Alge to move her. At last, however, a flash more blinding than the rest had caused her to scramble to her feet. They had run then, clumsily, for their limbs were chilled and cramped, through tangles of drenched undergrowth, along the slippery and sodden paths.

Now for a while they halted to take breath.

'It's hardly raining,' said Alge presently. 'I knew it wouldn't last. Come along, kiddo, let's do a scamper to the hut an' then you'll be O.K.'

Suddenly she laughed, and the smile which he had forced to reassure her faded as suddenly.

'The hut!' she said. 'You don't know where it is no more than me. We won't get there. It's going to get us first. The lightning. We're going to get struck.'

They were almost the first words she had spoken since her collapse an hour ago. Her voice was toneless, but her eyes were wild. And once again he seemed to catch that curious and brooding note of triumph.

'Get struck!' he echoed, in pale derision. 'Don't talk so silly! Why, the rain's almost stopped, and so's the lightning –'

He paused there, for to belie his words there came a distant, surly roar. The storm, which for a time had seemed to pass behind them in a circle, was now returning.

'It's coming back,' she said. 'There, see that flash!'

'Look here,' said Alge, 'what's come to you? If you're afraid why don't you get a move on? Come on, old Edie girl, no nonsense.'

He ended lamely. His attempt at mastery had failed. He stood confronting her in the soaked twilight of the forest. Before her glance his own fell cowed and baffled.

'It's coming back again,' she said. 'The lightning.'

Her voice, which had been toneless, held now an almost gloating quality.

He raised his eyes to hers. Upon her face, tight-lipped and tranced, there sat an unreal exaltation, a sort of dreadful and exultant acquiescence in fatality.

'Oh, God, shut up,' he said. 'You and your bloody lightning!'

His words had ended on a nervous shout, for at that instant came another flash much nearer than the last.

'Come on,' he said. 'I'm going to run. Almost on top of us that one, it was.'

He started off. The girl, after a moment's hesitation, followed him, but made no attempt to hurry.

'Come on,' he shouted back at her again. 'For heaven's sake, come *on*.'

He waited until she had come up with him. His face worked nervously. His lips were dry.

'Why can't you run?' he said. 'You say the lightning's going to strike you. . . . I believe you want it to. Gone loopy, that you have. . . .'

The perspiration broke upon his forehead. He seized her arm and tried to drag her by main force. 'Look here,' he screamed, 'you've got to come, or else I'm going on alone . . . Edie . . . Do you hear?'

They proceeded slowly in this fashion, whilst he, with one hand clenched about her wrist, cajoled, expostulated, and entreated, striving in vain to hurry her.

'I'll marry you . . . to-morrow, that I will . . . do anything you like . . . You hear? I'll marry you. . . .'

Any answer she might have given him was lost in a terrific peal of thunder. She started then to run with him. At last, and with the nearer threat of danger, that tranced and stony mood of hers had crumbled for the time.

They hastened down the sodden paths. Alge reasoned that sooner or later they must strike the road by which they had approached the forest. Once they hit that, the rest was simple.

3

It was as the trees began to thin around the edges of a clearing that Edie said: 'Listen! I thought I heard somebody shout.'

They stopped, straining their ears, but could hear nothing save the surly mutter of the thunder.

'It isn't anyone,' said Alge. 'They're all inside the hut by now. Let's get across this bit. I think I see a road.'

They hurried forward, gazing with eager eyes towards the spot at which his finger pointed.

'Make haste,' he called.

He had said that, and she, somehow, had run a little way before him through the fringing belt of trees. He heard her shout: 'Look, here's the quickest way,' and saw her pass from out the shadows of the wood and gain the centre of the clearing.

Then she looked up, and, following hard behind her at a distance of ten yards, he saw her face.

He heard her cry: 'Oh, Elge, the sky, the sky!'

A second later he was at her side and looked up too!

Above their heads, so close that one might touch it with an upraised hand, so curiously, fearfully remote that Edie's cry climbed tingling thinly and more thinly in its infinite ascent, the sky hung stretched and level as a painted card. Then, as Alge gazed, the card began to crumple slowly. An angry, brownish light shone round the circle of the hills.

He was surely and as instantly aware of threatened danger as if he watched the steady creeping of a flame along a fuse. Some

instinct threw him flat upon his face. 'Get lower, quick! Get down!' he shouted to the girl.

Next moment there came such a shattering shock as seemed to rend the earth. Although their eyes were shut they felt a blinding light as though all heaven had spouted into flame. And almost instantly a curious, deathly reek had filled their nostrils.

After some seconds Alge sat up.

From the woods of the farther side of the clearing towards which they had been running came a voice.

'Gor love us, that was a wunner. Something went west then in a hurry. Look, can't you see it? Over in the trees there. I can see the smoke. . . .'

The voice was lost awhile, but presently it shouted:

'Look, there's a bloke upon the ground. Why, blimey if it ain't young Elge. Look, an' there's Edie too.'

Alge had risen to his feet by the time his friends came up. Three of them, Bert and Jim and little Freda Bighouse, all very haggard and bedraggled, all chattering in a nervous rush of talk.

'We lost our way. Reckoned we was the only ones, we did, an' all the others snug inside.' 'That wasn't arf a stunner, was it?' 'Blew off ole Jimbo's 'at.' 'Where *is* the bally 'ut, then, anyway?' . . .

Presently there was a pause and then somebody said:

''Ullo, what's up with Edie – can't she speak?'

She was standing, very pale, and looking at the opening in the wood from which they had come out into the clearing. Just there the trees stood straight and calm against the sky, but from behind their screening forms, as from a hidden wound, there travelled faintly to them still that curious, pungent reek.

'Poor kid,' said Bert, 'she's properly done in. Never mind, Edie girl, you'll be O.K. along of us.'

'She's starin' at that place I saw the smoke,' said Jim. 'Don't she look queer? Tell us, what is it, Edie?'

She turned, white-faced, and spoke.

'Elge,' she said slowly, 'Elge, that was the place where we was waiting. Elge, it was meant for you and me.'

There was a pause and presently an awkward laugh. Then Alge said nervously:

'It's the storm that's made her queer. Just like a blessed jug of milk she is. . . .'

'Well, come along an' don't stand gassin' 'ere,' said Bert. 'It isn't over yet.'

Quite unexpectedly they came upon the road. Jim, with a shout of triumph, leaped across the broken fence that marked the ragged limit of the wood. 'And look,' he said, 'why, there's the 'ut. What price a cup o' tea?'

They pushed on jubilantly. Alge and Jim had drawn a little way ahead. Behind them Bert was walking with the tired girls.

As they neared the hut Alge caught the sound of Edie's voice: 'He's going to marry me.'

The words were plain. Jim could not have ignored them had he wished.

''Ullo,' he said, 'what's this I 'ear? You an' young Edie, eh? Shake 'ands, ole man!'

The two of them turned back to join the rest.

'Well, I'll be 'anged,' said Bert, 'some folks 'as funny ways. To go an' pop it in a blinkin' thunderstorm!'

'Ah,' giggled Freda in a nervous titter of excitement, 'I expect it was the storm as give 'im courage. The electricity an' that, you know.'

'Well, any'ow, cheer up, you two,' said Bert sarcastically, 'it isn't arf as bad as goin' to a funeral.'

A minute's further walking brought them to the hut. Just as they gained its shelter the storm broke out afresh.

4

The long, low wooden room was crammed with people. A dozen picnic parties, driven for refuge from all parts of the wood, filled it to overflowing. The air was blue with smoke and heavy with the steam that rose from soaking clothes.

'Ough! What a fug!' said Jim. 'I don't see any of our joint.'

But presently by dint of dogged shoving, they discovered their own party, miserably packed and steaming like the rest.

''Ullo,' said Bert, 'thought we was struck now, didn't you? An' so did we a little while ago.'

A dozen leaden-eyed and pallid faces stared back at him lethargically, too woebegone to smile. Five or six damp and tired girls were sitting in stolid and resigned discomfort on a form. Their drenched finery hung soaking round their bodies like the petals of so many dashed and muddied flowers. Wedged in a silent, surly knot beside a window, their swains stood smoking gloomily.

'Well, ain't you glad to see us then?' demanded Bert facetiously. 'We'd 'a' called earlier, but was detained over our toy-letts.'

'Pity there ain't a mirror,' replied some one sourly, 'and then you'd see yourselves."

'Better than sittin' in a row with faces like the backs of trams, at any rate,' said Bert ungallantly. ''Ere, what about a cup o' tea?'

'You've got some 'opes. The tea's all gorn. There's only bath water.'

Outside the rain descended in a vicious fury. A stretch of gravel round the hut was covered with a sudden white and seething carpet where the drops had stung the ground and risen ankle-high like steam. A lamp was lit. It shed a flickering and uncertain light so that each countenance appeared decayed, swimming within a sallow, watery unreality, like sick men's faces pictured in a dream.

Suddenly Edie cried: 'Where's Ruth?'

There was a moment's pause, then some one said:

'She hasn't come in yet.'

'Who saw her last?' Her voice rang out high pitched, tremulous with alarm. 'Who was she with, I say?'

'No need to worry, Edie. She's all right. She went with Mr. Meggeson. He'll see to 'er all right.'

'With Mr. Meggeson!'

'Yes. They was together any'ow the last I see of 'em. Lord love us, child, there's nothing to take on about. Whatever's happened to the girl!'

'It's the storm,' said Alge sulkily. 'It's given her a headache.'

'Too much excitement,' remarked Bert, with a meaning intonation. 'Which reminds me, you 'aven't 'eard the news.'

'The news! What news?'

'They've fixed it up together,' he proclaimed. ''Er an' young Elge.'

There was a moment's incredulous silence. Somebody began to whistle ''Snaughty but 'snice.' Then a girl tittered: 'That's why she's let 'er 'air down. "Opportunity's a fine thing," Edie.'

'Puss, puss!' called Freda. 'Give the chee-ild a chance. Can't you congratulate 'er?'

Alge stood confused. An angry flush had risen to his cheek. His fingers fidgeted about the lapel of his coat.

'Looks like a cat that's swallered a canary, I don't think.'

'More like an 'am-bone that's gone an' lost its frill. 'Ere, Elge, boy, give us a shake!'

After the handshaking and congratulations Alge slunk away. He edged between the shoulders of the crowd until he reached the strip of varnished wood that had served as counter while there was anything to sell. He looked up and by his side saw Bert.

'No luck,' said Alge. 'Not even a cake.'

'Never mind the cakes,' said Bert. 'You goin' to marry Edie?'

'Looks like it, doesn't it?'

'You better. . . .'

'I'd better! What d'you mean?'

He could make out Edie standing with the group beside the window. Her face was half averted, but he could fancy she was crying. Her hair hung down her back, but neatly now. Somebody, apparently, had lent her a slide. His gaze flickered, became furtive, then rebellious.

'What's it got to do with you?' he said.

Bert for a time stood silent. The rain had ceased. The lamp had been extinguished. The mutter of the thunder grew more distant. Somewhere a voice, sardonically festive, began to sing, 'Ain't we got Fun?'

'To do with me?' repeated Bert. 'To do –'

He stopped there suddenly. Alge followed the direction of his glance. 'Hello,' he said, 'here's Ruth and Mr. Meggeson.'

They had come in, soaking and dishevelled, from the storm. The curate's hat was gone, his grey alpaca coat was daubed with mud. His teeth chattered. His eyes were set in a peculiar, glassy stare. Just for a moment the thought had flashed across the mind of Alge: 'Good Lord, he's drunk.'

But Mr. Meggeson was not drunk, only very frightened. He had discovered them by this time, and made his way, still shivering, to where they stood. 'She's hurt herself,' he stammered. 'That last stroke. A branch fell on her arm.'

The girl beside him forced a flickering smile. 'It isn't anything,' she said, 'only a scratch. Mr. Meggeson did it up for me –'

'After a fashion,' said Mr. Meggeson. 'Only after a fashion. It ought to be attended to. . . .' His face was grey, peculiarly lined, and creased like crumpled paper.

Alge raised his voice: 'Edie,' he called, 'here's Ruth.'

But Edie was already at their side. She undid the handkerchief which Mr. Meggeson had tied around her sister's arm.

'It was the branch,' said Ruth in a faint whisper. 'A tree was struck. It might have killed us. That last stroke. . . .'

'I know,' said Edie. 'It nearly got us too. Anyone got some rag?'

Her voice was harsh and strained. Without raising her eyes to look at him, she returned his handkerchief to Mr. Meggeson.

'Some rag!' said Freda. 'You're welcome to my petticoat!'

The injured arm was bound.

Outside the storm had ended. A watery evening sun showed sheepishly behind the trees. People began to scatter from the hut.

'Hi, Ruthie, 'ave you 'eard the news?' said Jim. 'Your sister's gone and fixed it with young Elge.'

But Ruthie's only answer was a nervous smile.

The char-à-banc had come out from the garage. St. Saviour's 'Social and Endeavour' clambered to its seats. Slowly at first, then with a gathering roar that merged the cat-calls and the shouting in a general steady and incessant din, they started on their way.

For many a noisy mile they thundered on towards Hoxton.

Edie was sitting between Alge and Mr. Meggeson. Until they left the Lea Bridge Road to skirt the southern side of Clapton Common she had kept silence. Now, as the racing lights of shops and lamps began to twinkle on each shouting mouth and waving arm, she turned at last towards the curate and in a voice directed so that only he could hear, inquired:

'What are you going to do about it?'

'Do about what?' he stammered. For a while he did not catch her meaning, but as he marked the small, set face beside him, still tranced and curiously passionless as that of one who walks in sleep, a terrible misgiving filled his own.

'About my sister here, about young Ruth. . . . The lightning tried to get us, Elge and me. It tried to get you too. . . .'

His jaw had dropped. A stealthy sweat began to break upon his forehead. A look of horror crept into his eyes.

'She told you then,' he whispered. 'I – I'm going to marry her.'

It was a second or two later that some one in the seat behind them shouted:

'Hi, wake up there in front. Budge up, young Elge, and give 'er room. Your gel's a-goin' to faint!'

Another Temple Gone[1]

BY C. E. MONTAGUE

I

THEY say that there may be a speck of quiet lodged at the central point of a cyclone. Round it everything goes whirling. It alone sits at its ease, as still as the end of an axle that lets the wheel, all about it, whirl any wild way it likes.

That was the way at Gartumna in those distant years when the 'land war' was blowing great guns all over the rest of the County Clare. Gartumna lay just at the midst of that tempest. But not a leaf stirred in the place. You paid your rent if you could; for the coat that the old colonel had on his back – and he never out of the township – was that worn you'd be sorry. Suppose you hadn't the cash, still you were not 'put out of it.' All that you'd have to suffer was that good man buzzing about your holding, wanting to help; he would be all in a fidget trying to call to mind the way that some heathen Dane, that he had known when a boy, used to bedevil salt butter back into fresh – that, or how Montenegrins would fatten a pig on any wisp of old trash that would come blowing down the high road. A kind man, though he never got quit of the queer dream he had that he knew how to farm.

Another practising Christian we had was Father O'Reilly. None of the sort that would charge you half the girl's fortune before they'd let the young people set foot in the church. And, when it was done, he'd come to the party and sing the best song of anyone there. However, at practical goodness Tom Farrell left the entire field at the post. Tom had good means: a farm in fee-simple – the land, he would often tell us, the finest in Ireland, 'every pitaty the weight of the world if you'd take it up in your hand'; turf coming all but in at the door to be cut; besides, the full of a creel of fish in no more than the time you'd take dropping a fly on the stream: the keeper had married Tom's sister. People

[1] From *Fiery Particles*, by C. E. Montague, by permission of Messrs. Chatto & Windus.

would say 'Ach, the match Tom would be for a girl!' and gossips liked counting the 'terrible sum' that he might leave when he'd die if only he knew how to set any sort of value on money. But this he did not. The widow Burke, who knew more about life than a body might think, said Tom would never be high in the world because no one could come and ask for a thing but he'd give it them. Then, as she warmed to the grateful labour of letting you know what was what, the widow might add: 'I question will Tom ever make a threepenny piece, or a penny itself, out of that old construction he has away there in the bog.'

At these words a hearer would give a slight start and glance cannily round, knowing that it would be no sort of manners to give a decent body like Sergeant Maguire the botheration and torment of hearing the like of that said out aloud. But the sergeant would never be there. For he too had his fine social instincts. He would be half a mile off, intent on his duty, commanding the two decent lads that were smoking their pipes, one on each of his flanks, in the tin police hut away down the road. Gartumna did not doubt that this tactful officer knew more than he ever let on. A man of his parts must surely have seen, if not smelt, that no unclean or common whisky, out of a shop, had emitted the mellow sunshine transfiguring recent christenings and wakes. But who so coarse as to bring a functionary so right-minded up against the brute choice between falling openly short in professional zeal and wounding the gentle bosom of Gartumna's peace?

And yet the widow's sonorous soprano, or somebody else's, may have been raised once too often on this precarious theme. For, on one of the warmest June mornings that ever came out of the sky, Sergeant Maguire paraded his whole army of two, in line, on a front of one mile, with himself as centre file and file of direction, and marched out in this extremely open order into the fawn-coloured wilderness of the bog. 'You'll understand, the two of yous,' he had said to his right flank, Constable Boam, and to Constable Duffy, his left, 'that this is a sweeping or dhragging movement that we're making.'

The sun was high already – your feverish early starts were no craze of the sergeant's. The air over the bog had tuned up for the

day to its loudest and most multitudinous hum and hot click of grasshoppers and bees; all the fawn surface swam in a water-coloured quiver of glare; the coarse, juiceless grass and old roots, leathery and slippery, tripped up the three beaters' feet. Hour by hour the long morning greased and begrimed the three clean-shaven, good-soldier faces that had set out on the quest; noon came blazingly on – its savage vertical pressure seemed to quell and mute with an excess of heat the tropical buzz of all the basking bog life that the morning's sunshine had inspirited; another hour and the bog was swooning, as old poets say, under the embraces of the sun her friend, when a thin column of more intensely quivering air, a hundred yards off to the sergeant's half-left, betrayed some source of an ardour still more fiery than the sun's. Just for the next five or ten minutes, no more, the sergeant had some good stalking. Then it was all over. The hunting was done: nothing left but to whistle in his flank men and go over the haul.

The tub and worm of the illicit still had not been really hidden; they were just formally screened with a few blocks of turf as though in silent appeal to the delicacy of mankind to accept as adequate this symbolic tribute to the convention of a seemly reticence. Farrell, a little, neatly-made, fine-featured man with a set, contained face, but with all the nervousness of him quivering out into the restless tips of his small, pointed fingers, gazed at the three stolid uniformed bulks, so much grosser than he, while they disrobed his beloved machinery of that decent light vesture of turf and rummaged with large, coarse hands among the mysteries of his craft. He wore the Quakerish black suit and the broad and low-crowned soft black hat in which a respectable farmer makes his soul on a Sunday morning. Silent, and seemingly not shamed, nor yet enraged, neither the misdemeanant caught in the act nor the parent incensed by a menace to its one child, he looked on, grave and almost compassionate. So might the high priestess of Vesta have looked when the Gaulish heathen came butting into the shrine and messed about with the poker and tongs of the goddess's eternal flame. How could the poor benighted wretches know the mischief that they might be doing the world?

Sergeant Maguire, too, may have had his own sense of our

kind's tragic blindness quickened just then – that a man, a poor passionate man, should so rush upon his own undoing! 'Ach, it's a pity of you, Farrell,' he presently said. 'A pity! You with the grand means that you have of your own! An' you distillin' pocheen!'

'Pocheen!' The little, precise, nervous voice of Farrell ran up into a treble of melancholy scorn. With an austere quality in his movements he drew a brown stoneware jar from among some heaped cubes of turf that the barbarians had not yet disarranged. From another recess he took a squat tumbler. Into this he poured from the jar enough to fill a liqueur-glass rather smaller than most. 'Tell me,' he bade almost sternly, holding the tumbler out to Maguire, 'd'ye call that pocheen?'

'Ye can take a sup first,' was the canny reply. Maguire had heard how Eastern kings always make cooks and premiers taste first.

Farrell absorbed the tot, drop by drop. He did not cross himself first, but there was something about his way of addressing himself to the draught that would make you think of a man crossing himself before some devout exercise, or taking the shoes from off his feet before stepping on holy ground. As the potion irrigated his soul he seemed to draw off from the touch of this clamorous world into some cloistral retreat. From these contemplative shades he emerged, controlling a sigh, a little time after the last drop had done its good office. He poured out for Maguire.

'Well, here's luck,' said the sergeant, raising the glass, 'and a light sentence beyond.' The good fellow's tone conveyed what the etiquette of the service would not allow him to say – that in the day of judgment every mitigating circumstance would be freshly remembered.

Up to this his fortieth year Maguire, conversing with the baser liquors of this world and not with philtres of transfiguration, had counted it sin to drink his whisky as if it would burn him. So the whole of the tot was now about to descend his large-bore throat in close order, as charges of shot proceed through the barrel of a gun. But the needful peristaltic action of the gullet had scarcely commenced when certain tidings of great joy were

taken in at the palate and forwarded express to an astonished brain. 'Mother of God!' the sergeant exclaimed. 'What sort of hivven's delight is this you've invented for all souls in glory?'

A sombre satisfaction gleamed out of Farrell's monkish face. Truth was coming into its own, if only too late. The heathen was seeing the light. 'It's the stuff,' he said, gravely, 'that made the old gods of the Greeks and Romans feel sure they were gods.'

'Be cripes, they were right,' asseverated Maguire. He was imbibing drop by drop now, as the wise poets of all times have done, and not as the topers, the swillers of cocktails, punch and cup, and the like, things only fit to fill up the beasts that perish. Not hoggishness only, but infinite loss would it have seemed to let any one drop go about its good work as a mere jostled atom, lost in a mob of others. If ever the bounty of heaven should raise a bumper crop of Garricks on earth, you would not use them as so many supers, would you?

Farrell, after a short pause to collect his thoughts, was stating another instalment of the facts. 'There's a soul and a body,' he said, 'to everything else, the same as ourselves. Any malt you'll have drunk, to this day, was the body of whisky only – the match of these old lumps of flesh that we're all of us draggin' about till we die. The soul of the stuff's what you've got in your hand.'

'It is that,' said the sergeant, and chewed the last drop like a lozenge. He now perceived that the use of large, bold, noble figures of speech, like this of Farrell's, was really the only way to express the wonderful thoughts filling a man's mind when he is at his best. That was the characteristic virtue of Farrell's handiwork. Its merely material parts were, it is true, pleasant enough. They seemed, while you sipped, to be honey, warm sunshine embedded in amber and topaz, the animating essence of lustrous brown velvet, and some solution of all the mellowest varnish that ever ripened for eye or ear the glow of Dutch landscape or Cremona fiddle. No sooner, however, did this potable sum of all the higher physical embodiments of geniality and ardour enter your frame than a major miracle happened in the domain of the spirit: you suddenly saw that the most freely soaring poetry, all wild graces and quick turns and abrupt calls on your wits, was

just the most exact, business-like way of treating the urgent practical concerns of mankind.

So the sergeant's receivers were well tuned to take in great truths when Farrell, first measuring out the due dram for Constable Duffy, resumed, 'You'll remember the priest that died on us last year?'

'I do that, rest his soul,' said each of the other two Catholics. Constable Boam was only a lad out of London, jumped by some favour into the force. But a good lad.

'Ye'll remember,' Farrell continued, 'the state he was in, at the end? Perished with thinness, and he filled with the spirit of God the way you'd see the soul of him shining out through the little worn webbin' of flesh he had on, the match for a flame that's in one of the Chinese lanterns you'd see made of paper. Using up the whole of his body, that's what the soul of him was – convertin' the flesh of it bit by bit into soul till hardly a tittle of body was left to put in the ground. You could lift the whole with a finger.'

'Now, aren't ye the gifted man?' The words seemed to break, of themselves, out of Constable Duffy. Rapt with the view of entire new worlds of thought, and the feel of new powers for tackling them, Duffy gazed open-lipped and wide-eyed at Farrell the giver.

Farrell's face acknowledged, with no touch of wicked pride, this homage to truth. *Non nobis, Domine.* Austere, sacerdotal, Farrell inspected the second enraptured proselyte. Then he went on, his eyes well fixed on some object or other far out on the great bog's murmurous waste – the wilfully self-mesmerizing stare of the mystic far gone. 'The body's the real old curse. Not a thing in the world but it's kept out of being the grand thing it's got the means in it to be if it hadn't a hunk of a body always holding it back. You can't ever have all the good there is in a song without some old blether of words would go wrong on your tongue as likely as not. And in Ireland the glory an' wonder that's sent by the will of God to gladden the heart of a man has never got shut till this day of sour old mashes of barley and malt, and God alone knows what sort of dish-washin's fit to make a cow vomit,

or poisons would blister half of the lining off the inside of an ass.'

Constable Duffy was no man of words. But just at this moment he gained his first distinct view of philosophy's fundamental distinction between matter and form; the prospect so ravished his whole being that as he handed in the drained tumbler to Farrell he murmured in a kind of pensive ecstasy, 'Hurroosh to your soul!' and for a long time afterwards was utterly lost in the joys of contemplation.

Constable Boam's reversionary interest in paradise had now matured. While Farrell ministered to Boam, the grapes of the new wine of thought began abruptly to stammer through the lips of the sergeant. 'Aye! Every man has a pack of old trash discommodin' his soul. Pitaties and meal and the like – worked up into flesh on the man. An' the whole of it made of the dirt in the fields, a month or two back! The way it's a full barrow-load of the land will be walking on every two legs that you'd see shankin' past! It's what he's come out of. And what he goes back into being. Aye, and what he can't do without having, as long as he lasts. An' yet it's not he. An' yet he must keep a fast hold on it always, or else he'll be dead. An' yet I'll engage he'll have to be fighting it always – it and the sloth it would put on the grand venomous life he has in him. God help us, it's difficult.' Along the mazy path that has ever followed in the wake of Socrates the sergeant's mind slowly tottered, clinging at each turn to some reminiscence of Farrell's golden words, as a child makes its first adventurous journey on foot across the wide nursery floor, working from chair to chair for occasional support.

'Sorra a scrap of difficulty about it,' Farrell assured him, 'once you've got it firm set in your mind that it's all an everlastin' turnin' of body into soul that's required. All of a man's body that's nothing at all but body is nothing but divvil. The job is to cut a good share of it right out of you, clever and clean, an' then to inspirit the whole of the bit you have left with all the will and force of your soul till it's soul itself that the whole has become, or the next thing to the whole, the way the persons that lay you out after you die and the soul has quitted would wonder to see

the weeny scrap that was left for anybody to wake. You could take anything that there is in the world and go on scourin' an' scourin' away at the dross it has about it and so releasin' the workin's of good till you'd have the thing that was nine parts body and one part soul at the start changed to the other way round, aye and more. By the grace of God that's the work I've been at in this place. Half-way am I now, as you can see for yourselves, to transformin' the body of anny slushy old drink you'd get in a town into the soul of all kindness an' joy that our blessed Lord put into the water the good people had at the wedding. Nothin' at all to do but walk straight on, the way I was going, to work the stuff up to the pitch that you'd not feel it wettin' your throat, but only the love of God and of man an' the true wisdom of life, an' comprehension of this and of that, flowin' softly into your mind. Divvil a thing stood in me way, save only' – here the mild-hearted fanatic stooped for a moment from the heights where his spirit abode to note with a wan smile of indulgence a little infirmity of mankind's – 'a few of the boys do be lying around in the bog, the way they have me worn with the fear they'd lap the stuff hot out of the tub and be killed if I'd turn me back for one instiant.'

'They'll quit, from this out,' the sergeant said, with immense decision. 'I'll not have anny mischievous trash of the sort molestin' a man at his work.'

'Ow, it's a wonderful country!' Constable Boam breathed to himself. The words had been rising to Boam's Cockney lips at almost every turn of affairs since his landfall at Kingstown. Now they came soft and low, soft and low. A peace passing all understanding had just invaded the wandering Englishman's mind.

II

Let not the English be tempted to think that by no other race can a law be dodged for a long time without scandal. Neither the sergeant nor either man of his force was ever a shade the worse for liquor that summer. To Tom's priestly passion for purging more and yet more of the baser alloys out of the true

cult there responded a lofty impulse, among the faithful, to keep undeflowered by any beastlike excess the magical garden of which he had given them the key.

For it was none of your common tavern practice to look in at Tom's when the loud afternoon hum of the bees was declining reposefully towards the cool velvety playtime of bats and fat moths. All that plays and the opera, lift of romance and the high, vibrant pitch of great verse are to you lucky persons of culture; travel, adventure, the throwing wide open of sudden new windows for pent minds to stare out, the brave stir of mystical gifts in the heart, gleams of enchanting light cast on places unthought of, annunciatory visits of that exalting sense of approach to some fiery core of all life, watch-tower and power-house both, whence he who attains might see all manner of things run radiantly clear in their courses and passionately right. The police did not offer this account of their spiritual sensations at Tom's, any more than the rest of Gartumna did. But all this, or a vision of this, was for mankind to enjoy as it took its ease on the crumbling heaps of dry turf by the still, what time the inquisitive owls were just beginning to float in soundless circles overhead. From some dull and chilly outer rim of existence each little group of Tom's friends would draw in together towards a glowing focus at which the nagging 'No,' 'No,' 'No' of life's common hardness was sure to give place to the benedictive 'Yes,' 'Yes,' 'O yes' of a benignly penetrative understanding of earth, heaven, and everything else. Who such a beast as to attempt to debauch the delicate fairy conducting these mysteries? Too good to imperil, they seemed, besides, too wonderful to end. Dust, all the same, hath dimmed Helen's eyes, which seemed to so many people as if their light could not go out.

All revolutions, some pundits say, are, at bottom, affairs of finance. And Mrs. Burke had diagnosed truly. Tom bore within him the germ of that mortal illness of giving away all before him. His reign in all hearts at Gartumna resembled that of the Roi Soleil over France, both in the measureless glory of its meridian and in the fundamental insolvency of its afternoon. He had always given the work of his hands, to the worthy, free and without

price. The fitness to receive was all; something sacramental about the consumption of his latest masterpiece by small, close-drawn parties of beautiful souls made the passing of coin at such seasons abhorrent to Tom. 'Would you have me keep a shebeen?' he had indignantly asked, when the sergeant made a stout, shamefaced effort to pay. So from day to day they kept up an urbane routine, month after month. Tom would always proffer the squat glass with a shy, tentative gesture; this made it clear that in the sight of God, so to speak, no such freedom had ever been taken, or thought of, before. The sergeant would always accept in the jocose, casual tone of a martinet making one playful and really quite absurd exception to his rules, the case being one which, anyhow, cannot recur, so that there need be no uneasiness about setting up a precedent now. But all summers end, and urbanity butters no parsnips.

The brownness of later August was deepening round Tom's place of research before he saw that the thing couldn't go on as it was. He suddenly saw it, about ten o'clock one morning. That evening, when the day's tide of civilian beneficiaries had tactfully receded from the still, and the police, their normal successors, had laid rifle and helmet aside, Tom held up his dreadful secret from minute to minute while the grey moth of twilight darkened on into brown moth-coloured night. He tried to begin telling, but found he couldn't trust both his voice and his face at the same time. As soon as his face could no longer be clearly seen he worked up a prodigious assumption of calm and said to the three monumental silhouettes planted black on their three plinths of turf, 'I'm ruined. Apt you'll be to find me quit out of the place if you come back in two days or three.'

The sergeant leapt off his plinth, levered up by the shock: 'God help us!' he said. 'What wild trash are you just after gabbing?'

'Me fortune's destroyed,' Tom pursued. His face had crumpled up with distress as soon as he began; but the kind darkness hid that: his voice was in fairly good preservation. 'I borrowed the full of the worth of me holding to get' – and no doubt he was going on, 'get along with the work I'm at here,' but felt, perhaps,

that this would not be quite the thing, considering. So he broke off and said only, 'The back of me hand to the Jew mortgagee that's foreclosin'.'

'God help us!' again said the sergeant. 'And we drinking the creature out of house and home a good while back! Men – –!' He abruptly stiffened all the muscles of Duffy and Boam with the cogent parade voice that braces standing-easy into standing-at-ease. Then he thought for a moment. O, there was plenty to think of. Tom, the decent body, put out of his farm by the sheriff. Police aid, no doubt, requisitioned. The whole district, perhaps, in a hullabaloo, like all those around it. The Garden of Eden going straight back to prairie. He must be firm. 'Men,' he resumed 'are we standin' by to see a man ruined that's done the right thing by ourselves? I engage it's a mod'rate share only of cash he'll require to get on in peace with his work. An' the three of us unmarried men, with full pay and allowances!'

The heart of the ancient and good-natured people of England aligned itself instantly with the chivalrous spirit of the Gael. 'Thet's right, sawgeant,' said Constable Boam.

Constable Duffy's range of expression had not the width to cover fully the whole diversity of life. He ejaculated, 'Hurroosh to your souls! Five shillin's a week.'

'Sime 'ere,' subjoined Boam.

'Mine ten,' said Maguire, 'I've got me rank to remember.'

So swiftly and smoothly may any man's business pass, with seeming success, into a small limited company. Farrell, the innocent Farrell, took heart afresh and toiled on at the disengagement of Bacchus, the actual godhead, from out his too, too solid coatings of flesh. The force stilled the first wild fears of its heart and felt it was getting good value for its money – a quiet beat for the body, and for the soul an ever open line of communication with the Infinite. Through all Gartumna a warning shudder had run at the first crisis. Now the world seemed safe again; the civilian lamb lay down once more beside the three large lions of the law, dreaming it to be enough that these were no man-eaters. Children all, chasing a butterfly farther and farther into the wilds, under a blackening sky. While they chased, the good old

Resident Magistrate, Ponting, was dying of some sudden internal queerness he had, he that had never done harm to a soul if looking the other way could prevent it. And into Old Ponto's seat was climbing a raging dragon of what a blind world calls efficiency.

Major Coburn came, in fact, of that redoubtable breed of super-dragons, the virtuous, masterful, hundred-eyed cavalry sergeants who carve their way to commissions somewhat late in their careers. Precise as some old maids of exemplary life, as fully posted up in the tricks of the crowd that they have left as a schoolboy turned by magic into a master, they burn with a fierce clear flame of desire to make up the enjoyable arrears of discipline that they might, under luckier stars, have exercised in their youth. Being the thing that he was, how could the man Coburn fail to do harm, with all the harm that there was crying out to be done?

He sent for Sergeant Maguire. Quin, the district inspector – quite enough of an Argus himself without extra prompting – was there when the sergeant marched into the major's room. To outward view at this moment Maguire was fashioned out of first-rate wood. Within, he was but a tingling system of apprehensions. First, with gimlet eyes the two superiors perforated his outer timbers in numerous places, gravely demoralizing the nerve centres within. When these exploratory borings had gone pretty far, the crimelessness of Gartumna was touched upon – in a spirit of coarse curiosity far, far from felicitation.

Maguire faintly propounded the notion that keeping the law was just a hobby rife among the wayward natives. 'They're queer bodies,' he said in conclusion.

No fantasy like that could be expected to weigh with a new broom possessed with its first fine passion for sweeping. 'Don't tell *me*,' the major snapped. His voice vibrated abominably with menace. 'You know as well as I do, sergeant, the sort of a squadron it is where a man's never crimed.' He paused, to let this baleful thrust tell its tale in the agonized sergeant's vitals. Then he went on, 'and you know what it means,' and again he paused and the four gimlet eyes resumed their kindly task of puncturing him at assorted points.

To Maguire's previous distresses was now added the choice

mortification which always attends the discovery that you have been firing off an abstract and friarly morality at heavily armour-plated men of the world. With no loss of penetrative power, the major continued, 'Screening – that's what it means. Sergeants who need the stripes taking off them – that's what it means. Go back to your duty and see to it.'

Sergeant Maguire withdrew.

'He'd not comperhend. He'd not comperhend,' the sergeant despairfully told himself, over and over again, as he legged back the four miles to Gartumna under the early-falling September dew. If only the darkened mind of Major Coburn *could* gain understanding! Anybody on earth, you might think, if he had any wit at all to know good from bad, must see that this was a case in a thousand – that here, if ever in man's history, the spirit which giveth life was being borne down by the letter that killeth. But that body Coburn – ! Maguire had been a soldier: he knew those middle-aged rankers. 'Shut-headed cattle!' he groaned to himself. 'No doin' annything with them.' The dew was quite heavy. Sundown, autumn, and all that was best in the world going the way of honeysuckle and rose. Before he reached the tin hut one of the longest in human use among melancholy's standard dyes had suffused pretty deeply the tissues of the sergeant's mind.

It seemed next morning as if that summer's glowing pomp of lustrous months were taking its leave with a grand gesture of self-revival on the eve of extinction, as famous actors will bend up every nerve in order to be most greatly their old selves on the night of farewell. Midsummer heat was burning again, and the quicksilvery haze shimmered over the bog when Maguire went out alone to see Farrell, just as the sergeant remembered it on the day when the scorched air from the furnace first showed him the still. Farrell, a little leaner now, a little less natty in his clothes, a little more absent-eyed with the intensity of a single absorption, raised from his work the patiently welcoming face of genius called away by affairs of this world from its heavenly traffic with miracles.

'All destroyed, Tom,' the sergeant said quickly. The longer he

waited to bash in the unsuspecting up-turned face of Farrell's child-like happiness the more impracticable would it have grown. 'The glory,' he added by way of detail, 'is departed entirely.'

Farrell stared. He did not yet take it in well enough to be broken.

'It's this devastatin' divvil,' the sergeant went on, 'that they've sent us in lieu of Old Ponto – God rest his kind soul.'

Farrell did not seem to have even heard of that sinister accession. They say there were Paris fiddlers who fiddled right through the French Revolution and did not hear about the Bastille or the Terror. Live with the gods and deal with the Absolute Good, and Amurath's succession to Amurath may not excite you.

'God help the man, can't he see he's destroyed?' Fretful and raw from a night of wakeful distress, the sergeant spoke almost crossly, although it was for Tom that he felt most sorely in all that overshadowed world.

The worker in the deep mine whence perfection is hewn peered, as it were, half-abstractedly up the shaft. Not otherwise might some world-leading thinker in Moscow have looked partly up from his desk to hear, with semi-interested ears, that a Bolshevik mob was burning the house.

The disorganized Sergeant veered abruptly all the way round from pettishness to compunction. 'Dear knows,' he said, 'that it's sorry I am for ye, Tom.' He collected himself to give particulars of the catastrophe. 'A hustlin' kind of a body,' he ended, 'et up with zeal till he'd turn the grand world that we have into a parcel of old rags and bones and scrap iron before you could hold him at all. An' what divvil's work would he have me be at, for a start, but clap somebody into the jug, good, bad, or indifferent? *Now* do ye see? There isn't a soul in the place but yourself that does the least taste of a thing that anny court in the wide world could convict for. What with you and the old priest and the new, and the old colonel below, you've made the whole of the people a very fair match for the innocent saints of God. An' this a flea of a creature you couldn't even trust to be quiet an' not stravadin' out over the bog by himself like a spy, the way he'd soon have the whole set of us suppin' tribulation with a spoon of sorrow.'

Farrell subsided on one of the seat-like piles of sunned peat. The fearful truth had begun to sink in. He sat for a while silent, tasting the bitter cup.

The heat that day was a wonder. Has anyone reading this ever been in the Crown Court at Assizes when three o'clock on a torrid dog-day comes in the dead vast and middle of some commonplace murder case, of poignant interest to no one except the accused? Like breeze and bird and flower in the song, judge and usher, counsel and witnesses, all the unimperilled parties alike 'confess the hour.' Questions are slowly thought of by the Bar and languidly put; the lifeless answers are listlessly heard; motes of dust lazily stirring in shafts of glare thrown from side windows help to drowse you as though they were poppy seeds to inhale; all eyes, except one pair, are beginning to glaze; the whole majestic machine of justice seems to flag and slow down as if it might soon subside into utter siesta, just where it is, like a sun-drugged Neapolitan pavior asleep on his unfinished pavement. Only the shabby party penned in the dock is proof against all the pharmacopœia of opiates. Ceaselessly shifting his feet, resettling his neckcloth, hunting from each sleepy face to the next for some gleam of hope for himself, he would show, were anyone there not too deeply lulled to observe, how far the proper quality and quantity of torment is capable of resisting the action of nature's own anodynes.

Out in the bog a rude likeness of that vigil of pain, set amidst the creeping peace of the lotus, was now being staged. Under the rising heat of that tropical day the whole murmurous pulse of the bog, its flies and old bees, all its audible infestation with life seemed to be sinking right down into torpor while Sergeant Maguire's woebegone narrative dribbled off into silence and Tom came to the last of his hopeless questions. Questions? No; mere ineffectual sniffings among the bars of the closed cage of their fate. They both lay back on the warm turf, some ten feet apart, Tom staring up blankly straight into the unpitying blue while the sergeant stuck it out numbly within the darkened dome of his helmet, held over his face, striving within the rosy gloom of that tabernacle to gather up all his strength for the terrible plunge.

The plunge had to come. The sergeant rose on one elbow. He marshalled his voice. 'There's the one way of it, Tom,' he got out at last. 'Will you quit out of this and away to the States before I lose all me power to keep a hand off you?'

Farrell partly rose, too. His mind had not yet journeyed so far as the sergeant's along the hard road.

'I'll make up the fare from me savings,' the sergeant said humbly.

Farrell turned upon him a void, desolate face. The sergeant hurried on: 'The three of us down below will clear up when you're gone. An' we'll sling the still for you into the bog-hole. Aye, be sections, will we. An' everything.'

Farrell seemed to be eyeing at every part of its bald surface the dead wall of necessity. That scrutiny ended, he quietly said, 'Me heart's broke,' and lay back again flat on the peat. So did the sergeant. Nothing stirred for awhile except the agonized quiver and quake of the burnt air over the homely drain-pipe chimney of Tom's moribund furnace.

III

The sergeant wangled a day's leave of absence to go down to Queenstown the day Farrell sailed for New York. Farrell, absently waving a hand from some crowded lower deck of the departing ship, was a figure of high tragic value. Happy the mole astray above ground, or the owl routed out into the sun by bad boys, compared with the perfect specialist cast out upon a bewilderingly general world. The sergeant came away from the quay with his whole spirit laid waste – altruistic provinces and egoistic alike; his very soul sown with salt. He had been near the centre of life all the summer and felt the beat of its heart; now he was somewhere far out on its chill, charmless periphery – 'As the earth when leaves are dead.' He had not read Shelley. Still, just the same thing.

'I've done me duty,' he said in an almost God cursing tone as the three of them sat in the tin hut that night, among ashes, and heard the hard perpetual knock of the rain on the roof, 'an' I've done down meself.'

'Aye, and the whole of us,' Constable Duffy lamented, not meaning reproach, but sympathy only; just his part in the common threnody, antiphone answering unto phone.

Constable Boam had a part in it, too: ''Eaven an' 'Ell, 'Eaven an' 'Ell!' – He almost chanted his dreary conspectus of their vicissitudes. 'Ow! a proper mix-up! Gord! it's a wonderful country!'

Nothing more was heard of Farrell. He may have died before he could bring back into use, beside the waters of Babylon, that one talent which 'twas death to hide. Or the talent itself may have died out in his bosom. Abrupt terminations have ere now been put to the infinite; did not Shakespeare dry up, for no visible cause, when he moved back to Stratford? All that we know is that Tom's genius can never have got into its full swing in the States. For, if it had, the States could never have gone to the desperate length that they afterwards did against the god of his worship.

'Genius' [1]

BY ELINOR MORDAUNT

I HAVE written before of Ben Cohen, with his eternal poring and humming over the scores of great masters; of the timber-yard at Canning Town, for ever changing and for ever the same, devouring forests with the eternal windlike rush of saws, slide of gigantic planes; terribly practical and chill, wrapped in river-fogs, and yet exotic with the dust of cedar, camphor, paregoric.

In those days Ben Cohen was wont to read music as other boys read their penny-dreadfuls, avidly, with the imagined sound like great waves for ever a-rush through his soul.

In the very beginning it was any music, just music. Then for a while Wagner held him. Any Wagnerian concert, any mixed entertainment which included Wagner – it seemed as though he sniffed them upon the breeze – and he would tramp for miles, wait for hours; biting cold, sleet, snow, mud, rain, all alike disregarded by that persistence which the very poor must bring to the pursuit of pleasure, the capture of cheap seats.

Once ensconced, regardless of hard, narrow seats, heights, crowds, his passion of adoration and excitement took him, shook him, tore him so that it was wonder his frail body did not split in two, render up the soul coming forth as Lazarus from the sepulchre. It was indeed, if you knew little Ben Cohen, him, *himself*, difficult to realize that his body had anything more to do with him than the yellow-drab waterproof which is a sort of uniform – a species of charity, covering a multitude of sins of poverty, shabbiness, threadbareness – had to do with the real Jenny Bligh.

And yet, Ben Cohen's body was more completely his than one might have imagined. Jenny could, and indeed did, slough off her disguise on Sundays or rare summer days; but Ben and that self which was apart from music – that wildly-beating heart, pulsing blood, flooding warmth, grateful as the watchman's fire in the

[1] From *Short Shipments*, by Elinor Mordaunt, by permission of Messrs. Hutchinson & Co. (Publishers), Ltd.

fog-sodden yard, that little fire over which he used to hang, warming his stiffened hands – were, after all, amazingly one.

The thing surprised him even more than it surprised anyone else; above all, when it refused to be separated from his holy of holies, crept, danced, smiled its way through the most portentous scores – a thrilling sense of Jenny Bligh, all crotchets and quavers, smiles and thrills, quaint homeliness, sudden dignity.

By the time he first met Jenny he was clear of Wagner, had glanced a little patronizingly at Beethoven, turned aside and enwrapped himself in the sombre splendour of Bach, right away from the world; then, harking back, with a fresh vision, a sudden sense of the inevitable, had anchored himself in the solemn, wide-stretching harbourage of Beethoven.

It was like a return from a long voyage, tearing round a world full of beauty and interest, and yet, at the same time, full of pettiness, fuss, annoyance: a home-coming beyond words. There was a sense of eternity, a harmony which drew everything to itself, smoothing out the pattern of life, the present life and the life to come, so crumpled that, up to this time, he had had no real idea of the meaning of it.

All at once everything was immensely right, with Jenny as an essential and inevitable part of the rightness. He felt this so strongly that he never stopped to wonder if other people felt it as plainly as he did.

Apart from all this, he was bound by the inarticulateness of his class. His Jewish blood lent him a wider and more picturesque vocabulary than most, and yet it stopped at any discussion of his feelings.

We have an idea that what we call the 'common people' are more communicative on such subjects than we are; but this is not so. They talk of their physical ailments and sensations, but they are deeply shy upon the subject of their feelings. Ben's mother would discuss the state of her inside, the deaths of her relations and friends; his own birth, down to the smallest detail. But she would never have dreamt of telling her son that she loved him, desired his love, hungered for his coming, grieved at his going.

Ben himself put none of his feeling for Beethoven into words,

above all to his mother; she would not have understood him if he had. He said nothing of Jenny, either, save as a girl he'd met, a girl he was going to bring home to tea; but she understood that without any words; that was courting, part of the business of human nature; much like the preparation of meals.

It was odd, coming to think of it – might have been ridiculous, save that ridicule was the sort of thing which could find no possible lodgment with Ben – that his determination to devote his whole musical life to Beethoven, to interpret him as no Englishman had ever done before, should have been synonymous with his sacred, heady, and yet absolute determination to marry Jenny Bligh.

Jenny worked in the jam-factory, and there was something of the aroma of ripe fruit about her: ripe strawberries, raspberries, plums, damsons. She was plumpish and fresh: very red lips and very bright eyes, reddish-brown, the colour of blackberry leaves in autumn, with hair to match. Her little figure was neat; her small hands, with their square-tipped fingers, deft and quick in their movements; there was something at once rounded and clear-cut about everything she did.

A seafaring admirer used to say that she was 'a bit short in the beam, but a daisy fur carryin' sail'; and that was the idea she gave: so well-balanced, so trim, going off to work in her wide white apron on those rare mornings when she shook off the yellow mackintosh.

Ben saw her like that for the first time, crossing the Lee just below the timber-yard with its cranes like black notes zig-zagging out over the river, which had for once discarded its fog. It was a day of bright blue sky, immense, rounded, silvery clouds, fresh and clean; with a wind which caught up the white apron and billowed it out for the sheer fun of the thing: showing trim ankles, the turn of a plump calf, such as Ben Cohen had never even thought of before, the realization of which was like wine freshly tasted, red, fruity, running through his veins, mounting to his head. He had known that women had legs; his mother, the laundress, suffered from hers – complainingly, devoted woman as she was – swollen with much standing, and 'them there dratted veins': stocky legs, with loose folds of stocking.

As to thinking any more of a woman's legs than of the legs of a table, the idea had never even occurred to him. But there you are! It is the unexpected that happens: the sort of thing which we could never have imagined ourselves as doing, thinking, feeling. The temptations we have recognized, struggled against, are nothing. But on a sudden there comes a sort of wild, whistling wind from nowhere – much the same as that wind about Jenny's skirts, white apron – and our life is like a kaleidoscope, suddenly shaken up and showing a completely fresh pattern.

Who could have thought it – who? – that Ben Cohen, dreamer, idealist, passionate, pure, the devotee of art, would have fallen in love with Jenny Bligh's legs – or, rather, a pair of ankles, and a little more at that side where the wind caught her skirt – before he had so much as a glimpse of her face?

Just over the bridge she stopped to speak with another girl who worked in his own counting-house. As Ben hurried up to pass them before they separated, really see *her*, this other girl recognized him, flung him a friendly 'Hullo!' and was answered in the same fashion.

As he moved on he heard her – was meant to hear, knew that he was meant to hear, from the pitch of the voice –

'Clever ain't no word fur it! There ain't no tune as – '

The end of the sentence was lost; but he knew the sort of thing, knew it by heart, had spent his time running away from it. Now, however, he was grateful: more grateful still when he met Miss Ankles again, and she herself, regarding Florry Hines' eulogy as a sort of introduction, smiled, moved on a step, and herself tossed a 'Hullo' over one shoulder.

Ben's thin olive-tinted face was flushed as he drew forward to her side with his odd stoop, his way of ducking his head and raising his eyes, dark and glowing. He took Jenny's dinner-basket, and she noticed his hands, large and well-shaped, with long fingers widened at the tips. Florry had said that he was a 'Sheeny,' but there was nothing of the Jew about him apart from his colouring, his brilliant dark eyes; unless it were a sort of inner glow, an ardour, curbed by his almost childlike shyness, lack of self-confidence in everything apart from his music: that something,

at once finer and more cruelly persistent, vital, than is to be found in the purely Anglo-Saxon race.

Though Jenny liked what she called 'a pretty tune,' she knew nothing whatever of music, understood less. And yet, almost from that first moment, she understood Ben Cohen, realizing him as lover and child: understood him better, maybe, then than she did later on: losing her sureness for a while, shaken and bewildered, everything blurred by her own immensity of love, longing; of fearing that she did not understand – feeling out of it.

But that was not for some time to come: in the meanwhile she was like a dear little bantam hen with one chick; while Ben himself was content to shelter under her wing; until it grew upon him that, loving her as he did, loving his mother – realizing what it meant to be a mother, in thinking of Jenny herself with a child – his child – in her arms, it was 'up to' him to prove himself for their sakes, to make them proud of him and his music, without the faintest idea of how proud they were already – lift the whole weight of care from their shoulders.

The worst of it was, he told them nothing whatever about it. The better sort of men are given to these crab-like ways of appearing to move away from what they intend to move towards. It simply seemed as though he were forgetting them a little – then, more and more; elbowing them aside to clear the way for his beloved music.

He was no longer deprecating, appealing, leaning upon them: each woman thought of him as 'her child,' and when his love made a man of him, they realized the hurt, nothing more.

He overdid it, too, as genius does overdo things; was brusque, entirely immersed in his great scheme. Sometimes he even laughed to himself over this. 'They don't know what I'm up to!' he would declare to himself, with a sense of triumph.

He had never even thought of his music in the money sense before, but as his love and ambition for the two women grew upon him, he was like a child with a new toy.

He would not only make a great name, he would make an immense fortune: his mind blinked, dazzled at the very thought. He moved with a new pride, and also – alas! – a new remoteness.

His health had broken when he was about seventeen – his bent shoulders still showed that old drag upon the chest – and he was away in a sanatorium for a year. When he came back he was cured. It was young Saere, the junior partner in the timber business, who had sent him away; and it was he who, when Ben returned, paid for lessons for him, so that he learnt to play, as well as read, music.

From that time onward he had always stuck to the firm, working in the tally sheds; paid, out of his earnings, for the use of a room and a piano for practising upon so many hours each week, completely happy and contented.

He had never even thought of leaving the business until he realized his immense love for Jenny, and, through her, for his mother; the necessity for doing something big. What did sacrifice matter? What did it matter being poor, hungry, shabby? What did anything matter just for a while? There was so little he wanted; meals were a nuisance; his eyes were so dazzled by the brilliance of the future, set upon a far horizon, that he forgot the path of the present, still beneath his feet.

If his mother had not set food before him he would scarcely have thought of it. But, all the same, he ate it, and money had to be earned by some one or other.

His mother had never let him know the actual pinch of poverty; she wore that shoe upon her own foot. He had no more idea than a child of the cost of mere daily necessities; and during the last few years, between his work and hers, they had been comfortable enough.

'We can hang on for a bit,' he said, when he spoke of leaving the wood-yard; and she answered, almost with triumph, that she had 'hung on' well enough before he'd earned 'aught but a licking.'

At first she was proud of reshouldering the entire burden; it made him more entirely hers. He could not do without her; even with Jenny he could not do without her. But she had not been a young woman when Ben was born; she was old now, and tired, with that sort of tiredness which accumulates, heaps up, and which no single night's rest can ever cure; the tiredness which is ready, more than ready, for a narrower bed – eternal sleep.

'– Hold on until after the concert?'

'Sorry fur meself if I couldn't.'

The concert! That was the goal. There was a public hall at Clapton where Ben had chanced on some really good music – just one night of it, and quite by chance – and this, to his mind, ennobled the Claptonites; there was the place in which to start the revolutionizing of the musical world. Besides – and here he thought himself very canny, by no means a Jew for nothing – there were fine old houses at Clapton, and where there were such houses there must be rich people.

When the date was actually arranged, he practised for the best part of the day. While he was at home he read music; he lived in a maze of music. He never even thought of advertising, collecting his public; he even avoided his old friends, his patrons at the timber-yard, overcome by agonies of shyness at the very thought of so much as mentioning his concert. Quite simply, in a way he did not even attempt to explain to himself, he felt that the world of London would scent it from afar off. As to paid *claques*, presentation-tickets, patrons, advance agents, all the booming and flattery, the jam of the powder for an English audience, he had no idea of the existence of such things. Beethoven was wonderful, and he had found out wonderful things about him: that was enough.

When the Angel Gabriel blew the last trump, there would be no need to invite the dead to rise. Neither was there any need to invite the really elect to his concert. Not to hear him, Ben Cohen, but to hear Beethoven as he ought to be heard; that's how he felt.

During those weeks of preparation for the concert his mother worked desperately hard to keep their home together without his earnings, while Jenny helped. At first that had been enough for her, too; to help. But later –

Throughout those long evenings when, already tired from her work in the factory, she had stood sorting, sprinkling, folding, ironing, the two women got to a state where they scarcely dared to look at each other: just a passing glance, a hardish stare, but no *looking into*.

If he had but once said, 'I can't bear you to work so hard for

me,' everything would have been different, the fatigue wiped out. But he didn't; he didn't even know they were working for him, working beyond the limit of an ordinary working-woman's working-day, hard enough, in all conscience.

'Men can't not be expected to notice things the way we do.' That's what they told themselves – they did not say even this much to each other. But far, far away, out of sight, out of all actual knowledge, was the fear which neither of them would have dared to realize, a vague horror, a sort of ghost. . . .

'He don't care – he's changed.'

And, indeed, this is how it appeared. All through that time he wore an odd look of excitement, triumph, pleasure, which lifted him away from himself. There was a sort of lilt in his very step; his eyes shone, his cheeks were flushed. When he cleared a pile of freshly-ironed, starched things from the end of a table, so as to spread out a score upon it, laid them on the floor where the cat padded them over with dirty feet, and his mother railed at him, as she still did rail – on any subject apart from this of not caring – he glanced up at her with bright, amused eyes, his finger still following the black-and-white tangle of notes, looked at Jenny, and laughed – actually laughed.

'You great oaf!' cried Mrs. Cohen, and could have killed him. Up at four o'clock next morning, rewashing, starching, ironing, she retched with sick fatigue and something more – that sense of giddiness, of being hit on the head which had oppressed her of late. It was as though that laugh of Ben's had stuck like a bone in her chest, so sharp that she could scarcely draw breath; driven all the blood to her head.

And yet it had been full of nothing but triumph, a sort of tender triumph, almost childish delight. He was going to do wonders – wonders! – open a new world to them! He was so dazzled by his own work, dreams, by all he had in store for them, that he did not even see them, themselves, worn with toil, realize the meaning of it, the reason for it. In any case he would have laughed, because they had no idea how near it was to an end.

That concert! It would be like nothing so much as opening a door into a new world, where they need never so much as soil a

finger: floating around dressed in silk, feeding from off the finest china, sleeping upon down.

Man-like, his eyes were fixed upon the future. No two women had ever been loved as they were loved. All this work, this washing and ironing, it resembled nothing more than the opening scene in an opera: a sort of prelude, for the sake of contrast. They would see – o-o-oh, yes, they would see!

It was like that old childish, 'Shut your eyes and open your mouth.'

But they – they were bound in the close-meshed strait-waistcoat of endless toil, petty anxiety. The days and hours heaped in front of them obliterated all possible view of the future.

In the beginning they had been as excited as he was over the thought of the concert. He must wear a rosette – no, a flower in his buttonhole; and white kid gloves; as he moved forward upon the platform, he must bow right and left, and draw them off as he bowed.

This was Jenny's idea. It was Jenny who made him practise his bows, and it was Jenny who borrowed a dress-suit from a waiter-friend; while it was his mother who 'got up' the borrowed shirt to go with it, stiff and shining; who polished his best boots until they looked 'near as near like patent.'

All this had been done close upon a fortnight before. Jenny was a good girl, but if she was not there to see to things, Jenny might fail with a bubble on the shirt-front. No amount of meaning well was of any use in getting-up a stiff shirt as it ought to be got up.

'Better 'ave it all ready, 'a-case o' anything happening.' That was what Mrs. Cohen said to herself, with a dull dread at the back of her mind: a feeling as though every next day were a Friday.

Her face had been oddly flushed of late, with a rather fixed and glassy look about the eyes. Jenny thought of this, on her way to the concert, alone; for by some ill fate, his nearer vision blurred in that golden maze of the future, Ben had fixed his concert for a Friday.

This – Friday! Always a bad day, bad in itself, bad for every-

one, like an east wind; worst of all for a laundress: not so depressing as a Monday, but so hurried, so overcrowded with all the ironing and folding, the packing of the lots, all small, into their separate newspaper parcels; the accumulated fatigue of a whole week. Some demon seemed to possess her clients that week: they had come in with a collar here, a shirt there, an odd pillow-slip, table-cloth, right over Thursday. She was working until after twelve o'clock that night – so was Jenny – up before dawn next morning, though no one save herself knew of this.

'Whatever they do, they shan't not keep me from my Ben's concert!' That was what she said, with a vision of motors blocking the road in front of the little hall. But she had been a laundress best part of a lifetime – before she discovered herself as the mother of a genius – and it had bitten into her bone: she could not get finished, and she could not leave the work undone.

'Someone's got to earn a living!' – that was what she said, embittered by fatigue, the sweat pouring down her face, beaten to every sensibility, apart from her swollen feet, by the time that Jenny called in for her, soon after six. She had longed to go, had never even thought of not going; but by now, apart from her physical pain and weariness, she was alive to but one point, her whole being drawn out to a sort of cone with an eye at the end of it; and far, far away at the back of her brain, struggling with impenetrable mists, but one thought – if she scorched anything, she would have to replace it.

When Jenny found that it was impossible to move her, she made her own way up to Clapton alone, for Ben had to be at the hall early; there were certain matters to arrange, and he would try over the piano.

Her efforts with Mrs. Cohen had delayed her; she was driven desperate by that cruel malice of inanimate things: every 'bus and tram was against her, whisking out of sight just as she wanted them, or blocked by slow crawling carts and lorries. There was a tight hard pain in her heart, like toothache, round which her whole body gathered, pressing, impaled upon it; a sense of desperation, and yet at the heart of this, like a nerve, the wonder if anything really mattered.

Ben had promised to reserve seats for his mother and herself; but had he? – Had he? Would she find the place blocked up by swells with their hard stare, duchesses and such-like, glistening in diamonds? In her mind's eyes she saw billows of silk, slabs of black cloth and shining white shirt-fronts – hundreds and hundreds of them. And Ben bowing, bowing to them as she had taught him to do.

For some time past he had been so far away, so detached that she was haunted by the fear that if she put out a finger to touch him it might go through him, as though he were a ghost. At time she had caught him, held him to her in a passion of love and longing. But even then, with his head against her heart, his lips, or some pulse or nerve, had moved in a wordless tune, the beat of time.

If only he had still seemed to need her, nothing, nothing would have mattered. But he didn't: he needed no one – no one. He seemed so frail, she had made sure that he wanted looking after; but he didn't. A drunkard might have fallen down in the street, needed fetching, supporting, exhorting; a bully come home with a broken head. But it seemed as though Ben were, in reality, for all his air of appeal, sufficient to himself, moving like a steady light through the darkness; unstirred by so much as a breath of wind.

Overcome by anxiety, she got out of the tram too soon. It had begun to rain, a dull, dark night, and there was a blur of misty light flooding the pavement a little way ahead. That must be the hall. She was afraid of overshooting the mark. Those trams had such a way of getting going just as one wanted to be out of them!

But the light was nothing more than a cinema, and she had a good quarter of a mile to walk in the wet. The cruel wet! – just like it to be wet on that night of all nights! Even her optimism was gone. She kept on thinking of Mrs. Cohen, her flushed face and oddly-glazed eyes; the queer stiff way in which she moved, held her head. For once she was angry with Ben.

''Im and his crowds! 'Im an' 'is fine lydies! 'Im an' 'is *motor-cars*!'

After all, she did overshoot her mark; on inquiry for the hall,

she was told that she had passed it, and was obliged to retrace her steps.

No wonder she had passed it; with all she had expected at the back of her mind! The strip of pavement outside was dark, with not so much as a single taxi in sight; the door half-shut, the dreary vestibule badly-lighted, empty, smelling of damp. The sodden-looking sketch of a man in the pay-box seemed half asleep; stretched, yawned when she spoke, pushing a strip of pink paper towards her as she gave her name.

'For two.' He poked out a long neck and peered round the edge of the box, like a tortoise from its shell.

'The other lydy wasn't not able ter come ter-night,' answered Jenny with dignity, and the beast grinned, displaying a wreckage of broken teeth.

'Ain't not what you might call a crowd, anyway,' he remarked.

She could have killed him for that! She realized the white face of a clock, but she would not look at it. She was early, that was it. Look how she had hurried. No wonder that she was early. And great ladies were always late; she had learnt that from the *Daily Mail* stories.

'Two an' two make four – them too late an' me too early!' she said to herself, with a gallant effort after her own brisk way of taking things, a surer tap of heels on the stone floor as she turned towards a swing-door to her left; pushed it open, and was hit in the face by what seemed like a thick black curtain.

A dim white-gloved hand was thrust through it and took her ticket.

'Mind you don't fall – no good wasting the lights until they come – if ever they does come,' exhorted and explained a voice out of the darkness; for, after all, it was not a curtain but just darkness.

At first Jenny could see nothing. Then, little by little it seemed as though different objects crept forward, one by one, like wild animals from their lair.

Those white patches, the hands of two white-gloved men, holding sheaves of programmes – she realized one between her own fingers – whispering together.

There was the platform, the great piano sprawling over it; and in front of this, rows and rows and rows – and rows upon rows – of empty seats.

She looked behind her – they had argued long over the question of places for herself and his mother. 'The very best,' that's what Ben had said; but they fought against this, fought and conquered, for the best seats meant money.

'What's a seat more or less, I'd like to know.'

'Money, all money.' Old Mrs. Cohen had been firm upon this point.

Still, there were a great many seats yet further back – and all empty: a little raised, seeming to push themselves forward with the staring vacuity of an idiot: more seats overhead in a curving balcony, rising above each other as though proud of their emptiness. It would have been impossible to believe that mere vacant places could wear so sinister, as well as foolish, an aspect. An idiot, but a cruel idiot, too: the whole thing one cruel idiot, of the sort that likes to pull legs from flies.

There was a clock there, also. For a long while Jenny would not allow herself to look at it. But something drew her, until it became an unbearable effort to keep her eyes away from it, to look anywhere else; and at last she turned her head, stared, sharply defiantly, as though daring it.

It was five-and-twenty minutes to nine: Five-and-twenty minutes to nine, and the concert was to have begun at eight! – Five-and-twenty minutes to nine, and there was no one there – no one whatever!

The clock hands dragged themselves on for another five minutes; then one of the men disappeared behind the scene; came back, speaking excitedly, gesticulating with white hands:

'We're to turn on the light. 'E swears as 'e won't give it up – 'e's goin' ter play."

'Goin' ter play? Well, I'll be blowed! – Goin' ter play! An' with nothing 'ere but *That!*'

Jenny saw how he jerked his head in her direction. So she was 'That' – she, Jenny Bligh! – and so far gone that she did not even care.

As the lights went up the hall seemed to swim in a sort of mist: the terra-cotta walls, the heavy curtains at either side of the platform, those awful empty seats!

Jenny spread her skirt wide, catching at the chair to either side of her, stretching out her arms along the backs of them. She had a wild feeling as though it were up to her to spread herself sufficiently to cover them all. She half rose. Perhaps she could hide more of that emptiness if she moved nearer to the front: that was her thought.

But no; she mustn't do that: this was the place Ben had chosen for her; she must stay where she was. He might look there, miss her, and imagine that there was nobody, nobody at all; that even she had failed him.

If only she could spread herself – spread herself indefinitely – multiply herself: anything, anything to cover those beastly chairs: sticking out there, grinning, shaming her man!

Then she had a sudden idea of running into the street; entreating the people to come in; was upon her feet for the second time, when Ben walked on to the platform.

For once he was not ducking or moving sideways; he came straight forward, bowed to the front of him, right and left; drew off his gloves and bowed again. Mingling with her agony of pity, a thrill ran through Jenny Bligh at this. He remembered her teaching; he was hers – hers – hers – after all, hers – more than ever hers.

The borrowed coat, far too big for him, rose in a sort of hood at the back of his neck; as he bowed something happened to the centre stud of his shirt, and it disappeared into an aperture shaped like a dark gourd in the whiteness.

But, for all that, Jenny felt herself overawed by his dignity, as any one would have been: there was something in the man so much greater than his clothes, greater than his conscious, half-childish self.

Jenny's hands were raised to clap; but they dropped into her lap, lay there, as, with a face set like marble, Ben turned and seated himself at the piano. There was a moment's pause, while he stared straight in front of him – such a pause that a feeling of

goose-flesh ran down the back of her arms – then he began to play.

Jenny had not even glanced at her programme; she would have understood nothing of it if she had; but it gave the Sonata, Op. III, as the opening piece.

Ben, however, took no notice of this; but, for some reason he could not have explained, flung himself straight away into the third item, the tremendous 'Hammerclavier.'

The sounds flooded the hall; swept through it as if it were not there, obliterating time and space. It was as though the Heavenly Host had descended upon the earth, sweet, wonderful, and yet terrible, with a sweep of pinions, deep-drawn breath – Tubal Cain and his kind, deified and yet human in their immense masculinity and strength.

Jenny Bligh was neither imaginative nor susceptible to sound, but it drew her out of herself. It was like bathing in a sea whose waves overpower one so that, try as one may to cling to the earth, it slips off from beneath one's feet – shamed, beaten. She had a feeling that if it did not stop soon she would die; and would yet die when it did stop. Her heart beat thickly and heavily, her eyes were dim; she was bewildered, lost, and yet exhilarated. It was worse than an air-raid, she thought – more exciting, more wonderful.

The end left her almost as much exhausted as Ben himself. The sweat was running down his face as he got up from his seat, came forward to the front of the platform, and bowed right and left. Jenny had not clapped – she would as soon have thought of clapping God with His last trump – but Ben bowed as though a whole multitude had applauded him.

By some chance, the only direction in which he did not turn his eyes was the gallery: even then, he might not have seen a single figure seated a little to one side – a man with a dark overcoat buttoned up to his chin, who clapped his two thumbs noiselessly together, drawing in his breath with a sort of whistle.

'That's the stuff!' he said. 'That's the stuff to give 'em!'

After a moment's pause, Ben turned again to the piano. This time he played the Sonata Pathétique in C Minor, Op. XIII; then

the Sonata Waldstein in C Major. Between each, he got up, moved forward to the edge of the platform, and bowed.

At the end of the Sonata, Op. III – by rights the first on the programme – during the short interval which followed it he straightened his shoulders with a sort of swagger, utterly unlike himself, swung round to the piano again, and slammed out 'God Save the King.'

He played it through to the very end, then rose, bowed from where he stood, stared round at the empty hall – a dreadful, strained, defiant smile stiffening upon his face – and sinking back upon his stool, laid his arms across the keyboard, with a crash of notes, burying his head upon them.

In a moment Jenny was out of her seat. There were chairs in her way, and she kicked them aside; raked one forward with her foot, and scrambled on to the platform; then, catching a sideways glimpse of the empty seats, bent forward and shook her fist at them.

'Beasts! Pigs! A-a-a-ah! – You!'

The attendants had disappeared, the stranger was lost in shadows. There was nobody there but themselves: it would not have mattered if there had been: all the lords and ladies, all the swells in the world would not have mattered. The great empty hall, suddenly friendly, closed, curving, around them.

Jenny dropped upon her knees at Ben's side, and flung her arms about him, with little moans of love and pity; slid one hand beneath his cheek, with a muffled roll of notes, raised his head and pressed it against her heart.

'There, my dear! There, my love – there – there – there!'

She laid her lips to his thick dark hair, in a passion of adoration, loving every lock of it; and then, woman-like, picked a white thread from off his black coat; clasped him afresh, with joy and sorrow like runnels of living water pouring through and through her.

'There, there, there, there!'

He was too much of a child to fight against her: all his pride gone. 'Oh, Jenny, Jenny, Jenny!' he cried; then, in an extremity of innocent anguish, amazement –

'They didn't come! They don't care – they don't want it! Jenny, they don't want it!'

'Don't you worry about them there blighters, my darling. Selfish pigs! they ain't not worth a thought. Don't you worry about them.'

'But – Beethoven . . .'

'Don't you worry about Beethoven, neifer – ain't no better nor he oughter be, taeke my word fur it. Lettin' you in like this 'ere! There – there – there, my dear!'

They clung together, weeping, rocking to and fro.

'Well,' said the man in the gallery, 'I'm jiggered!' and crept out very softly, stumbling a little because of the damp air which seemed to have got into his eyes and made them smart.

As the lovers came out into the little vestibule, clinging to each other, they did not so much as see the stranger, who stood talking to the man in the box-office, but went straight on out into the rain, with their unbrellas unopened in their hands.

'A good thing as the 'all people insists upon payment in advance,' remarked the man in the box-office, with a titter.

The other gave him a curious, half-contemptuous glance. 'I'd like to hear you say that in a year's time.'

'Why?'

'Because that chap will be able to buy and sell a place like this a hundred times over by then – Queen's Hall – Albert Hall – I know. It's my business to know. There's something about his playing. That *something different* they're all out for.'

It took a long time to get back to Canning Town. Even Jenny had lost her certainty, her grasp of the ways of 'buses and such things. She felt oddly clear and empty, like a room swept and garnished with the sense of a ghost in some dim corner of it physically sapped out.

Ben clung to her. He said very little, but he clung to her, with an odd, lost air: the look of a child who has been slapped in the face, and cannot understand why.

She was so much smaller than he, like a diminutive, sturdy steam-tug; and yet if she could have carried him she would have done so.

As it was, she threw her whole heart and soul into guiding, comforting; thinking of a hundred things at once, her soft mouth folded tight with anxiety: How to prevent him from feeling shamed before his mother; how to keep the trouble away from her; though at the back of her own mind was a feeling – and she had an idea that it would be at the back of old Mrs. Cohen's also – of immense relief, of some load gone – almost as though her child had been through a bad attack of scarlet-fever, or something which one does not take twice.

With all this, there was the thought of what she would step out and buy for their supper, if the fried-fish shop were still open; all she would do and say to cheer them.

As for Ben, the 'Hammerclavier' was surging through his brain, carrying the empty hall with it, those rows upon rows of empty seats – swinging them to and fro so that he felt physically sick, as though he were at sea.

Quite suddenly, as they got out of the last tram, the rain ceased. At the worst it had been a mild night of velvety darkness and soft airs, the reflection from the lamps swimming in a haze of gold across the wet pavement; but now, just as they reached the end of his own street, the black sky opened upon a wide sea of pinkish-amber and a full moon sailed into sight. At the same moment, Ben's sense of anguished bewilderment cleared away, leaving in its place a feeling of incalculable weariness.

To be back in his own home again – that was all he asked. 'You'll stay the night at our place, Jenny?'

'Yes; I promised your mother.' Her brow knitted, and then cleared again. Ah, well, that was all over: Ben would go back to his regular job again; they would get married; then there would be her money, too: no need for old Mrs. Cohen to do another hand's turn. Plenty of time for her to rest now: all her life for resting in.

'Your mother.' As she spoke Ben remembered, for the first time, actively remembered, for of course it was his mother that he meant when he thought of home.

'She wasn't there, Jenny! She wasn't there!'

'She was very busy, 'adn't finished 'er work.' Something

beyond Jenny's will stiffened within her. So he had only just realized it! She tried not to remember, but she could not help it – the flushed face, the glassy eyes: the whole look of a woman beaten, with her back against a wall; condemning Ben by her very silence, desperate courage.

'Work?'

'Yes, work.' Jenny snapped it, hating herself for it, drawing him closer, and yet unable to help it.

'Why –' began Ben, and then stopped – horrified. At last he realized it: perhaps it ran to him through Jenny's arm; perhaps it was just that he was down on earth again, humble, ductile, seeing other people's lives as they were, not as he meant to make them.

'Ter-night – workin' –'

'All night; one the saeme as another.'

'But why –' he began again; stopped dead, loosed his own arm and caught hers. 'All this while workin' like that! She works too hard. Jenny, look here: she works too hard. And I – this damned music! Look here, Jenny, it's got to stop! I'll never play a note again; she shall never do a hard stroke of work again; never, never – not so long as I'm here to work for her. All my life – ever since I can remember – washing and ironing, like – like – the very devil!'

He pulled the girl along with him. 'That was what I was thinking all the time: to make a fortune so that you'd both have everything you wanted, a big house, servants, motors, silk dresses . . . And all the time letting you both work yourselves to death! But this is the end; no more of that. To be happy – that's all that matters – sort of everyday happiness.

'No more of that beastly washing, ironing – it's the end of that, anyhow. When I'm back at the timber-yard –'

He was like a child again, planning; they almost ran down the street. 'No more o' that damned washin' and ironin' – no more work –'

True! How true! The street door opened straight into the little kitchen. She was not in bed, for the light was still burning; they could see it at either side of the blind, shrunk crooked with

steam. There was one step down into the kitchen; but for all that, the door would not open when they raised the latch and pushed it stuck against something.

'Some of those beastly old clothes!' Ben shoved it, hailing his mother. 'Mother! Mother, you've got something stuck against the door.' Odd that she did not come to his help, quick as she always was.

After all, it gave way too suddenly for him to altogether realize the oddness; and he stumbled forward right across the kitchen, seeing nothing until he turned and faced Jenny still standing upon the step, staring downward, with an ashy-white face, wide eyes fixed upon old Mrs. Cohen, who lay there at her feet, resting – incomprehensibly resting.

They need not have been so emphatic about it all – 'No more beastly washing, no more work' – for the whole thing was out of their hands once and for all.

She had fallen across the doorway, a flat-iron still in her hand – the weapon with which she had fought the world, kept the wolf from that same door – all the strain gone out of her face, a little twisted to the left side, and oddly smiling. One child's pinafore remained still unironed; the rest were folded, finished.

They raised her between them, laid her upon her own bed. It was Jenny who washed her, wrapped her in clean linen – no one else should touch her; Ben who sat by her, with hardly a break, until the day that she was buried, wiped out with self-reproach, grief; desolate as any child, sodden with tears.

He collected all his music into a pile, the day before the funeral, gave it to Jenny to put under the copper – a burnt offering.

'If it hadn't been for that, she might be here now. I don't want ever to see it again – ever to hear a note of it!' That was what he said.

Jenny went back to the house with him after the funeral; she was going to give him his tea, and then return to her own room. In a week they were to be married, and she would be with him for good, looking after him. That evening, before she left, she would set his breakfast, cut his lunch ready for the morrow. By Saturday week they would be settled down to their regular life together.

She would not think about his music; pushed it away at the back of her mind – over and done with – would not even allow herself the disloyalty of being glad. And yet was glad, deeply glad, relieved, despite her pride in it, in him: as though it were something unknown, alien, dangerous, like things forbidden.

Two men were waiting at the door of the narrow slip of a house: the tall thin one with his overcoat still buttoned up to his chin, and another fat and shining, with a top-hat, black frock-coat, and white spats.

'About that concert –' said the first man.

'We were thinking that if we could persuade you to play –' put in the other.

'There was no one there,' interrupted Ben roughly. His shoulders were bent, his head dropped forward on his chest, poking sideways, his eyes sullen as a child's.

'I was there,' put in the first man, 'and I must say impressed –'

'Very deeply impressed,' added the other; but once again Ben brushed him aside.

'You were there – at my concert!' Jenny, standing a little back – for they were all three crowded upon the tiny doorstep – saw him glance up at the speaker, with something luminous shining through the darkness of his face. 'At my concert – ! And you liked it? You liked it?'

' "Like" is scarcely the word.'

'We feel that if you could be persuaded to give another concert,' put in the stout man blandly, 'and would allow –'

'I shall never play again – never – never!' cried Ben, harshly; but this time the other went on imperturbably:

'– allow us to make all arrangements, take all responsibility; boom you; see to the advertising and all that – we thought if we were to let practically all the seats for the first concert go in complimentary tickets, get a few good names on the committee – perhaps a princess or something of that sort as a patroness – a strong *claque* –'

'Of course, playing Beethoven – playing him as you played him the other night. Grand – magnificent!' put in the first man,

realizing the weariness, the drop to blank indifference in the musician's face.

'The "Hammerclavier," for instance –'

It was magical. – 'Oh, yes, yes – that – that!' Ben's eyes widened, his face glowed. He hummed a bar or so. 'Was there ever anything like it? My God! was there ever anything like it?'

Jenny, who had the key, squeezed past them at this, and ran through the kitchen to the scullery, where she filled the kettle and put it upon the gas-ring to boil; looked round her for a moment, with quick, darting eyes – like a small wild animal at bay in a strange place – then drew a bucketful of water, turned up her sleeves, the skirt of her new black frock, tied on an old hessian apron of Mrs. Cohen's, with a savage jerk of strings, and dropping upon her knees, started to scrub the floor, the rough stone floor.

'Men! – trapsin' in an' out, muckin' up a place!'

She could hear the murmur of men's voices in the kitchen, and through it that 'trapsin' ' of other men struggling with a long coffin on the steep narrow stairs.

On and on it went – the agonized remembrance of all that banging, trampling; the swish of her own scrubbing-brush; the voices round the table where old Mrs. Cohen had stood ironing for hours and hours upon end.

Then the door into the scullery was opened. For a moment or so she kept her head obstinately lowered, determined that she *would not* look up. Then, feeling her own unkindness, she raised it and smiled upon Ben, who stood there, flushed, glowing, and yet too shamefaced to speak – smiled involuntarily, as one must smile at a child.

'Well?'

'That – that – music stuff – I suppose it's burnt?' he began, fidgeting from one foot to another, his head bent, ducking sideways, his shoulder to his ear.

Her glance enwrapped him – smiling, loving, bitter-sweet. Things were not going to be as she had thought; none of that going out regularly to work, coming home to tea like other men; none of that safe sameness of life. At the back of her calm was a fierce battle; then she rose to her feet, wiped her hands upon her

apron, stooped to the lowest shelf of the cupboard, and drew out a pile of music.

'There you are, my dear. I didn't not burn it, a'cause – Well, I suppose as I sorter knowed all the time as you'd be wantin' it.'

Children! Well, one knew where one was with children – real children. But men, that was a different pair of shoes altogether – something you could never be sure of; unless you remembered, always remembered, to *treat* them as though they were grown-up, *think* of them as children.

'Now you taeke that an' get along back to yer friends an' yer playin', an' let me get on with my work. It'll be dark an' tea-time on us afore ever I've time ter so much as turn round.'

'That woman,' said the fat, shining man, as they moved away down the street, greasy with river-mist. – 'Hang it all! where in the world are we to get a taxi? – Commonplace little thing; a bit of a drag on him, I should think.'

'Don't you believe it, my friend – that's the sort to give 'em – some'un who will sort of dry-nurse 'em – feed 'em – mind 'em. That's the wife for a genius. The only sort of wife – mark my word for it.'

The Reaping Race

BY LIAM O'FLAHERTY

At dawn the reapers were already in the rye field. It was the big rectangular field owned by James McDara, the retired engineer. The field started on the slope of a hill and ran down gently to the sea-road that was covered with sand. It was bound by a low stone fence, and the yellow heads of the rye-stalks leaned out over the fence, all round in a thick mass, jostling and crushing one another as the morning breeze swept over them with a swishing sound.

McDara himself, a white-haired old man in grey tweeds, was standing outside the fence on the sea-road, waving his stick and talking to a few people who had gathered even at that early hour. His brick-red face was all excitement, and he waved his blackthorn stick as he talked in a loud voice to the men about him.

'I measured it out yesterday,' he was saying, 'as even as it could be done. Upon my honour there isn't an inch in the difference between one strip and another of the three strips. D'ye see? I have laid lines along the length of the field so they can't go wrong. Come here and I'll show ye.'

He led the men along from end to end of the field and showed how he had measured it off into three even parts and marked the strips with lines laid along the ground.

'Now, it couldn't be fairer,' cried the old man, as excited as a schoolboy. 'When I fire my revolver they'll all start together, and the first couple to finish their strip gets a five-pound note.'

The peasants nodded their heads and looked at old McDara seriously, although each one of them thought he was crazy to spend five pounds on the cutting of a field that could be cut for two pounds. They were, however, almost as excited as McDara himself, for the three best reapers in the whole island of Inverara had entered for the competition. They were now at the top of the field on the slope of the hill ready to commence. Each had his wife with him to tie the sheaves as they were cut and bring food and drink.

They had cast lots for the strips by drawing three pieces of seaweed from McDara's hat. Now they had taken up position on their strips awaiting the signal. Although the sun had not yet warmed the earth and the sea breeze was cold, each man had stripped to his shirt. The shirts were open at the chest and the sleeves were rolled above the elbow. They wore grey woollen shirts. Around his waist each had a multi-coloured 'crios,' a long knitted belt made of pure wool. Below that they wore a white frieze drawers with the ends tucked into woollen stockings that were embroidered at the tops. Their feet were protected by raw-hide shoes. None of them wore a cap. The women all wore red petticoats, with a little shawl tied around their heads.

On the left were Michael Gill and his wife, Susan. Michael was a long wiry man, with fair hair that came down over his forehead and was cropped to the bone all round the skull. He had a hook nose, and his lean jaws were continually moving backwards and forwards. His little blue eyes were fixed on the ground, and his long white eyelashes almost touched his cheek-bones, as if he slept. He stood motionless, with his reaping hook in his right hand and his left hand in his belt. Now and again he raised his eyelashes, listening for the signal to commence. His wife was almost as tall as himself, but she was plump and rosy-cheeked. A silent woman, she stood there thinking of her eight-months-old son whom she had left at home in charge of her mother.

In the middle Johnny Bodkin stood with his arms folded and his legs spread wide apart, talking to his wife in a low serious voice. He was a huge man, with fleshy limbs and neck, and black hair that had gone bald over his forehead. His forehead was very white and his cheeks were very red. He always frowned, twitching his black eyebrows. His wife, Mary, was short, thin, sallow-faced, and her upper teeth protruded slightly over her lower lip.

On the right was Pat Considine and his wife, Kate. Kate was very big and brawny, with a freckled face and a very marked moustache on her upper lip. She had a great mop of sandy-coloured curly hair that kept coming undone. She talked to her husband in a loud, gruff, masculine voice, full of good humour. Her husband, on the other hand, was a small man, small and

slim, and beginning to get wrinkles in his face, although he was not yet forty. His face had once been a brick-red colour, but now it was becoming sallow. He had lost most of his front teeth. He stood loosely, grinning towards McDara, his little, loose, slim body hiding its strength.

Then McDara waved his stick. He lifted his arm. A shot rang out. The reaping race began. In one movement the three men sank to their right knees like soldiers on parade at musketry practice. Their left hands in the same movement closed about a bunch of rye-stalks. The curved reaping hooks whirled in the air, and then there was a crunching sound, the sound that hungry cows make eating long fresh grass in spring. Then three little slender bunches of rye-stalks lay flat on the dewy grass beneath the fence, one bunch behind each reaper's bent left leg. The three women waited in nervous silence for the first sheaf. It would be an omen of victory or defeat. One, two, three, four bunches . . . Johnny Bodkin, snorting like a furious horse, was dropping his bunches almost without stopping. With a loud cheer he raised his reaping hook in the air and spat on it, crying 'First sheaf!' His wife dived at it with both hands. Separating a little bunch of stalks, she encircled the head of the sheaf and then bound it with amazing rapidity, her long thin fingers moving like knitting needles. The other reapers and their wives had not paused to look. All three reapers had cut their first sheaves and their wives were on their knees tying.

Working in the same furious manner in which he had begun, Bodkin was soon far ahead of his competitors. He was cutting his sheaves in an untidy manner, and he was leaving hummocks behind him on the ground owing to the irregularities of his strokes, but his speed and strength were amazing. His great hands whirled the hook and closed on the stalks in a ponderous manner, and his body hurtled along like the carcase of an elephant trotting through a forest, but there was a rhythm in the never-ending movement of his limbs that was not without beauty. And behind came his wife, tying, tying speedily, with her hard face gathered together in a serious frown like a person meditating on a grave decision.

Considine and his wife were second. Considine, now that he was in action, showed surprising strength and an agility that was goat-like. When his lean, long, bony arms moved to slash the rye, muscles sprang up all over his bent back like an intricate series of springs being pressed. Every time he hopped on his right knee to move along his line of reaping he emitted a sound like a groan cut short. His wife, already perspiring heavily, worked almost on his heels, continually urging him on, laughing and joking in her habitual loud hearty voice.

Michael Gill and his wife came last. Gill had begun to reap with the slow methodic movements of a machine driven at low pressure. He continued at exactly the same pace, never changing, never looking up to see where his opponents were. His long lean hands moved noiselessly, and only the sharp crunching rush of the teeth of his reaping hook through the yellow stalks of the rye could be heard. His long drooping eyelashes were always directed towards the point where his hook was cutting. He never looked behind to see had he enough for a sheaf before beginning another. All his movements were calculated beforehand, calm, monotonous, deadly accurate. Even his breathing was like, and came through his nose like one who sleeps healthily. His wife moved behind him in the same manner, tying each sheaf daintily, without exertion.

As the day advanced people gathered from all quarters watching the reapers. The sun rose into the heavens. There was a fierce heat. Not a breath of wind. The rye-stalks no longer moved. They stood in perfect silence, their heads a whitish colour, their stalks golden. Already there was a large irregular gash in the rye, ever increasing. The bare patch, green with little clover plants that had been sown with the rye, was dotted with sheaves, already whitening in the hot sun. Through the hum of conversation the regular crunching of the reaping hooks could be heard.

A little before noon Bodkin had cut half his strip. A stone had been placed on the marking line at half-way, and when Bodkin reached the stone he stood up with the stone in his hand and yelled: 'This is a proof,' he cried, 'that there was never a man born in the island of Inverara as good as Johnny Bodkin.' There was

an answering cheer from the crowd on the fence, but big Kate Considine humorously waved a sheaf above her head and yelled in her rough man's voice: 'The day is young yet, Bodkin of the soft flesh!' The crowd roared with laughter, and Bodkin fumed, but he did not reply. His wits were not very sharp. Gill and his wife took no notice. They did not raise their eyes from the reaping.

Bodkin's wife was the first to go for the midday meal. She brought a can full of cold tea and a whole oven cake of white flour, cut in large pieces, each piece coated heavily with butter. She had four eggs, too, boiled hard. The Bodkin couple had no children, and on that account they could afford to live well, at least far better than the other peasants. Bodkin just dropped his reaping hook and ravenously devoured three of the eggs, while his wife, no less hungrily, ate the fourth. Then Bodkin began to eat the bread and butter and drink the cold tea with as much speed as he had reaped the rye. It took him and his wife exactly two minutes and three-quarters to finish that great quantity of food and drink. Out of curiosity, Gallagher, the doctor, counted the time down on the shore-road. As soon as they had finished eating they set to work again as fiercely as ever.

Considine had come level with Bodkin, just as Bodkin resumed work, and instead of taking a rest for their meal, Considine and his wife ate in the ancient fashion current among Inverara peasants during contests of the kind. Kate fed her husband as he worked with buttered oaten cake. Now and again she handed him the tea-can and he paused to take a drink. In that way he was still almost level with Bodkin when he had finished eating. The spectators were greatly excited at this eagerness on the part of Considine, and some began to say that he would win the race.

Nobody took any notice of Gill and his wife, but they had never stopped to eat, and they had steadily drawn nearer to their opponents. They were still some distance in the rear, but they seemed quite fresh, whereas Bodkin appeared to be getting exhausted, handicapped by his heavy meal, and Considine was obviously using up the reserves of his strength. Then, when they reached the stone at half-way, Gill quietly laid down his hook and told his wife to bring the meal. She brought it from the

fence, buttered oaten bread and a bottle of new milk, with oatmeal in the bottom of the bottle. They ate slowly, and then rested for awhile. People began to jeer at them when they saw them resting, but they took no notice. After about twenty minutes they got up to go to work again. A derisive cheer arose, and an old man cried out: 'Yer a disgrace to me name, Michael.' 'Never mind, father,' called Michael, 'the race isn't finished yet.' Then he spat on his hands and seized his hook once more.

Then, indeed, excitement rose to a high pitch, because the Gill couple resumed work at a great speed. Their movements were as mechanical and regular as before, but they worked at almost twice the speed. People began to shout at them. Then betting began among the gentry. Until now the excitement had not been intense because it seemed a foregone conclusion that Bodkin would win since he was so far ahead. Now, however, Bodkin's supremacy was challenged. He still was a long way ahead of Gill, but he was visibly tired, and his hook made mistakes now and again, gripping the earth with its point. Bodkin was lathered with sweat. He now began to look behind him at Gill, irritated by the shouts of the people.

Just before four o'clock Considine suddenly collapsed, utterly exhausted. He had to be carried over to the fence. A crowd gathered around, and the rector, Mr. Robertson, gave him a swig from his brandy flask that revived him. He made an effort to go back to work, but he was unable to rise. 'Stay there,' said his wife angrily, 'you're finished. I'll carry on myself.' Rolling up her sleeves farther on her fat arms, she went back to the reaping hook, and with a loud yell began to reap furiously. 'Bravo,' cried McDara, 'I'll give the woman a special prize. Gallagher,' he cried, hitting the doctor on the shoulder, 'after all . . . the Irish race . . . ye know what I mean . . . man, alive.'

But all centred their attention on the struggle between Bodkin and Gill. Spurred by rage, Bodkin had made a supreme effort, and he began to gain ground once more. His immense body, moving from left to right and back again across his line of reaping, seemed to swallow the long yellow rye-stalks, so quickly did they fall before it. And as the sheaf was complete his lean wife grabbed

it up and tied it. But still, when Bodkin paused at five o'clock to cast a look behind him, there was Gill coming with terrible regularity. Bodkin suddenly felt all the weariness of the day overcome him.

It struck him first in the shape of an intense thirst. He sent his wife up to the fence for their extra can of tea. When she came back with it he began to drink. But the more he drank the thirstier he became. His friends in the crowd of spectators shouted at him in warning, but his thirst maddened him. He kept drinking. The shore-wall and victory were very near now. He kept looking towards it in a dazed way as he whirled his hook. And he kept drinking. Then his senses began to dull. He became sleepy. His movements became almost unconscious. He only saw the wall, and he fought on. He began to talk to himself. He reached the wall at one end of his strip. He had only to cut down to the other end and finish. Three sheaves more, and then . . . Best man in Inverara . . . Five-Pound Note . . .

But just then a ringing cheer came to his ears, and the cry rose on the air: 'Gill has won.' Bodkin collapsed with a groan.

The Beautiful Sea

BY T. F. POWYS

MR. DAY, the pastor, always believed that if only Mrs. Moggs could be persuaded to leave her little shop, that was also the village post office, upon a Sunday or any holiday, and go down and look at the sea, her soul's salvation would be sure to follow such a visit.

'Her soul must feel sorrowful,' Mr. Day would remark, 'amongst all this starch and boot polish, it must long to get away, at least for an hour or two, from so many balls of string and pen-wipers.'

Whenever Mr. Day went to the Dodderdown shop, stepping carefully upon the stone path in winter, so as to avoid the puddles that lay here and there where the stones were broken, he would say very earnestly, after paying for his stamps: 'You ought to go and look at the beautiful sea, Mrs. Moggs.' 'Oh, it's quite enough for me,' Mrs. Moggs would reply, 'to hear the waves roar, so I have no wish to go and look at them.'

Sometimes Mr. Day would describe the sea. 'It's as beautiful as the blue sky,' he would say, 'and its colours are heavenly and are exactly like' – and Mr. Day would look excitedly around him – 'those pretty sweets on your top shelf.'

'But it's a long way to the sea?'

'Only half a mile,' Mr. Day would reply.

Mrs. Moggs was tidiness itself, nothing was ever out of place in her shop, and she always knew exactly where to lay her hands upon anything that was wanted. Her round face was pleasant and friendly, and two fine grey curls hung down on each side of her head like pretty bells. Whenever Mrs. Moggs shook her head these bells would shake, too, and Betty Pring used to say, when Mrs. Moggs told her that there were no more sweets in the bottle, that 'she's bells were a-ringing.'

One spring day the pastor brought to Mrs. Moggs a present of two white mice. 'I thought you might like to play with them,'

he said, 'when you feel lonely, though they're nowhere near as beautiful as the sea.'

'Oh, I'm sure the sea's nothing like so lovely,' said Mrs. Moggs, and put the mice into a drawer where they could be happy. 'They'll do nicely there,' she said, 'and they can't hurt the postal orders, because I never put them into that drawer.'

Everyone in Dodderdown admired the white mice that Mr. Day had given to Mrs. Moggs, who said they were more beautiful than the sea.

Although nearly every day Mrs. Moggs' round kindly face glowed with content, sometimes a day would come when she looked timid and careworn, and this always happened when the postmaster from the town rudely pushed open the shop door and came in with his questions.

His questions were always about the money, and he would look hard at Mrs. Moggs as he questioned her, as though he was sure that she had done something with the stamps or the orders that she shouldn't have done.

'If ever you allow anyone to owe you for a stamp you'll get yourself into trouble,' Mr. Hunt, the postmaster, would say crossly.

Mrs. Moggs would look timidly into the face of her inquisitor, as if she fully expected him to tell her the very next moment to go to the workhouse, that was in Mrs. Moggs' idea the very nearest thing in England to a torture chamber.

Sometimes when he had brought Mrs. Moggs almost to tears, and the happy ringing of her bells to a sad silence, the postmaster would ask in a grand breezy way, copied exactly from Squire Blewberry – as he stretched out his stockinged legs in imitation of the same fine personage –'how far off was the sea?' Before answering his question Mrs. Moggs would perhaps hand a paper of pepper to Betty Pring, who had stood in the shop doorway asking repeatedly for shoe-laces.

'Oh, Mr. Day, is always talking about the sea,' Mrs. Moggs would answer nervously, 'but I have never been there, you know, so I cannot tell how far off it is. Oh dear, I believe I gave Betty pepper instead of laces – but she's gone away now.'

Whenever Mrs. Moggs had a bad dream, it would always take the form of some loss or other connected with the stamps, or the postal orders, and in the winter nights when the winds shook the ivy, or when in summer the great moon peeped in upon her, she would awake in terror, hearing Mr. Hunt in the grand bullying voice that he always used to inferiors, telling her, who was the kindest old woman in the world, that she was a thief and a liar. She didn't mind the thief so much, for she remembered one, mentioned in the Bible, who died in God's company and with a sure promise of Paradise; but she couldn't bear the thought of being called a 'liar.'

Mr. Hunt would always shout that word out so loudly in her dream, that Mrs. Moggs would awake all in a tremble, and afterwards she would think of all the fine things Mr. Day had said about the beautiful sea in order to compose herself to sleep again.

It was now summer, and Mr. Day was standing upon the yellow sands and wishing that he could persuade Mrs. Moggs to come and look at the sea. The sea looked so beautiful and clear that Mr. Day could see little fish swimming in it, and coloured stones that shone down at the bottom.

'If only she would come,' said Mr. Day, 'I feel sure that her soul would leap and cry out for eternity.'

The pastor looked farther away, to where the sea and sky met one another.

'Her soul would not stay only as far as her eyes can see, but it would rush on until the glory of God is reached,' he said.

In the shop Mrs. Moggs allowed Betty Pring to take the little white mouse called Tony in both her hands and to kiss it.

''E be pretty and tickly,' said Betty, 'but mayn't I take up little Gertie, too?'

Mrs. Moggs shook her head, making her bells ring merrily, and smiled at Betty and whispered, 'that she believed Gertie was making a nest so that she mustn't be disturbed.'

'But one day I'll give you a tiny one just like Tony,' said Mrs. Moggs, handing Betty the stamp she had called for but without troubling her for the money.

'That will do to-morrow,' said Mrs. Moggs, and her bells rang again.

Mrs. Moggs awoke the next morning very hopeful and happy; she believed that when she went downstairs and peeped into a certain drawer she would see little baby mice. But this wasn't the only reason for her happiness; there was another that gave Mrs. Moggs pleasure, which was that the postmaster had apparently forgotten the village.

'Perhaps,' thought Mrs. Moggs, showing in her thought the innocence of her nature, 'he will never come again.'

Mrs. Moggs dressed herself slowly, and stood before the glass and shook her curls and listened, and she thought she heard bells ringing.

When she looked into the drawer to see how many mice were born she counted seven. She was so glad to see them that she hardly noticed that the mice had bitten a hole in the other drawer where her stamps and postal orders were kept. But when she wiped her glasses and looked more closely at the nest she saw that it was made up of little bits of coloured paper. Mrs. Moggs started; a large motor-car had drawn up at her door and a man was stepping out of it.

Mrs. Moggs turned very pale, as Mr. Hunt, in his noisiest manner, came into the shop, and at once demanded of Mrs. Moggs an account of the stamps and orders that she had sold.

While Mrs. Moggs looked for her books Betty Pring opened the door and holding out some pennies she said, 'These are for the stamps we owe for, Mrs. Moggs.'

Mr. Hunt looked fiercely at Betty, who dropped all the pennies.

'Yes, I see,' said Mr. Hunt, glancing at the figures, 'and now bring me what you have in stock, please.'

'But where are the rest of them,' asked the postmaster, after he had counted what Mrs. Moggs brought to him.

'The mice,' Mrs. Moggs began trembling and looked extremely guilty.

'You're a liar,' shouted Mr. Hunt.

Mrs. Moggs remembered the sea. The shop faded, and Mr.

Hunt went as a bad dream goes, and before her was the sea as Mr. Day, the pastor, had described it to her.

Mr. Hunt was gone from Dodderdown, but what exactly he had said to her she did not know, though the one shameful word had been plainly spoken; and even Betty Pring, who had been looking through the window, had heard it, too.

Mrs. Moggs fetched her bonnet and cloak.

In the lane she met Mr. Day, who was stepping upon the stone path just as carefully as if the winter puddles were still there. The pastor stopped and held up his hands in astonishment and wonder.

'I am going to the beautiful sea,' said Mrs. Moggs, nodding her head while her bells rang. . . .

A Kind of Freedom

BY ANTHONY RICHARDSON

I

De Bouille found Bertie at the corner of one of the side-streets that run into the East India Dock Road. They are most loathsome streets, always misty-dark, utterly straight and squalid. They steer into the brightly-lit road at right angles, and before you come to the Docks on your right on several corners stand public-houses, infamous flaunting places with gaudy mirrors and a deal of brass-work. The smells down the Road are many and varied, but chief among them are the sweet, sickly odour of bad confectionery and the sour tang of beer.

Pearl, who was with de Bouille, was in half a mind to go back. She had enjoyed the run down from Piccadilly on the top of a 'bus – it was not considered very proper then for young women to ride aloft, but Pearl did not care. She had enjoyed seeing the crowds beneath, the flares, the flaming gin-palaces – it had been a spree, but she was not enjoying her walk alongside de Bouille, rubbing elbows with Stepney and getting hustled along.

She took his arm.

'Jumbo, let's get right out of this now. I'm tired.'

De Bouille patted her arm. He was younger then and a stalwart protector.

'Not yet,' he said. 'Not yet, dearie. I've got a hunch that I'll spot something to-night.'

She shrugged her shoulders and pouted. It was no good arguing with him when he was like this. He could be as obstinate as a mule, when he had the mood on him. Perhaps it was that very obstinacy, a tenacity of purpose making him deaf to entreaties of all kinds, especially those of pretty women, that had enabled him to succeed as he had done. He had two shows running steadily and strongly, one at the Frivolity and another at the Lyrical. He was going to put *The Faun* on in two weeks' time at the Palais Royal. Kariloff had done the music and Pearl was going to dance. It was the best thing Kariloff had done by a long way and would

have brought fortune and fame to him then and there if it had not been for Bertie Cumberlege and Lizzie. But Kariloff's an old man now and with more money than he knows what to do with. You can still get the Bridal Dance, though, on old gramophone records.

They saw Bertie at the corner of the third street before you reach the Docks. There was a little crowd round him, mostly kiddies, though people were even then stopping to look at him. He had just arrived at his pitch outside the public-house and was getting into his stride. De Bouille pushed into the small crowd and watched. The light from the public-house was hard and glaring. A woman, a huge slattern with a fine, handsome face, was whirling the handle of a barrel-organ. It was a gay tune, tinkling and staccato, and if it had not been for the smell coming through the half-open door of the bar, and the elbows that jabbed into your ribs, it would all have been rather jolly. As it was, Pearl was annoyed. She wanted to get back to Jermyn Street and de Bouille's comfortable flat.

But she lost all sense of irritation when Bertie began to dance. He was a short, weedy little fellow of about five-and-twenty, with dirty clothes and split boots and a muffler round his neck. His face was pinched and peaky with hunger and fatigue, a strangely old face for so young a man, and yet with an elfin air about it. His legs were long and awkward and his wrists, bare in the ragged coat, thin and sinewy. But it was not his dancing that made de Bouille gasp and Pearl lean forward – it was the things he was doing with his hands. Each bony fist held half-a-dozen coppers. As he began to dance to that rakish, jangling tune, he began to rattle the pennies. They clicked and rattled louder and louder, a strange rhythm, that in later days was to be called syncopation.

He did a dozen steps in this manner and then warmed to his work. He flicked the coins from hand to hand as a conjurer sends the cards arching across, he shot them into the air and caught them in his mouth; they clicked and clinked and Bertie's skinny legs worked like an automaton's. The barrel-organ stopped suddenly and Bertie threw all twelve coins into the air and caught them behind his back. The woman by the instrument jerked a cap off a hook at the side of the machine. She lunged towards the crowd,

smiling and with her head on one side, a little defiant, certainly domineering. The audience kept their hands in their pockets.

She glared at them:

'Come on now. D'you think we does this for pleasure?'

It was a strange way of seeking her patrons' rewards, but it worked.

Two pimply youths produced threepence between them, and then it was de Bouille's turn. The woman stared at him, a hard, antagonistic regard that he met steadily with his own keen, tilted glance. He gave her five shillings without a quiver of his broad lips. They fell shining, one by one, those five shillings, into a ragged cap. A dramatic touch from a man who'd lived in and by drama all his life.

She broke into a sudden fit of coughing – a tearing, rending paroxysm that shook her through and through. When it was over she stared again at de Bouille through streaming eyes. It was not emotion – it was the cough. If de Bouille expected a sudden outburst of gratitude he was disappointed. He got a shot from her fine eyes, of suspicion. But: –

'Thank you, sir,' she said mechanically.

And then she made her partner dance again. The verb is just. She *made* him. In four seconds they had received as much as a whole night's work would have brought in the ordinary circumstances, but she looked across her shoulder at him, leaning, lips apart, that crooked, consumptive Puck of the streets, against the hurdy-gurdy. He smiled and shook his head. She stepped to the machine and drove the handle round.

He danced again.

'Did you see?' whispered Pearl.

And de Bouille nodded.

'My! but she leads him the devil of a life.' Pearl shuddered.

That scene lived long with them. See for yourself the white faces of the crowd, the glaring white light of the public-house window, the wine-dark night stabbed with the tongues of flares and lamps and in the centre, on the shining road, Puck dancing, his coins twittering out the rhythm.

'Fairyland,' whispered Pearl.

'Shucks!' De Bouille felt for his money. 'Fairyland be damned. That boy's a genius.'

An unsentimental, hard-bitten fellow, de Bouille, but with an eye for discoveries. He had never been beaten yet.

They tackled Bertie as Lizzie put her shoulder to the organ to move to the next pitch.

Bertie was rubbing his coins with care before he dropped them into his pocket.

'Been long at this?'

The little man screwed his face up.

'Since a nipper, guv'nor.'

'Make anything at it?'

'A bloke has 'ard times. Off an' on –'

A woman shouldered her way into the group.

'We does better than most.'

'I'm sure of that,' said de Bouille. He fixed her with his who-the-devil-are-you look. She frowned at him. De Bouille was amused.

'I suppose you could do with bigger earnings?'

Bertie grinned.

'Do wiv 'em! O 'ark at 'im. You blokes wot lives at ease. I don't mean no offence, guv'nor – only to a fellow wot knows 'is job. Every man to a trade, only –'

'You like the – work?'

'I 'as to. But it's a art. There's not another this side o' Stepney that can crack pennies like me.'

'Then you'd better come and see me,' said de Bouille and gave him his card. 'Nine o'clock to-morrow morning. Come as you are. I can do something for you.'

They left him, then, but Pearl heard:

'Liz! O blimy Liz. He's der Bou-ill, that's him. He's a nut, Liz.'

It even made Pearl's little icy heart glow at the tones. Then Lizzie started coughing again.

II

By eight-thirty de Bouille was in his office. He seemed anxious. At nine Pearl and Kariloff came in.

Kariloff, young then, with the dark hair falling over his high forehead, his white, delicate face lined and weary, shook a trembling finger at de Bouille.

'Pearl tells me – my dear friend, my dear business-man, what is it you do? A street-juggler for the Bride's Dance? It is absurd.'

'Oh, shucks!' said de Bouille. 'Wait and see. I know what I'm doing. Pearl dances, don't she, with the chorus as a crowd at her back? Oh, it's good, Kariloff – but listen here.'

He rose from his seat and lumbered across the room to a piano.

'See here.'

With a stubby forefinger he picked out a jingling, tinketty tune – Lizzie's tune.

'You can run that into something, Kariloff. And see – Pearl upstage and the crowd behind her and then douse the glim and in comes, through the chorus, mind you, this street-fairy of mine, just as he is, with his clinking coins; all the Cockney gaiety, the –'

He fluttered his hands up.

'The sheer damn' impertinence of the thing. God! but I'm clever.'

'Well, is he here?'

'He's coming,' said de Bouille.

Then Bertie came in. Kariloff gave a little scream and shook his head wildly, Pearl gasped, wanted to laugh, felt the tears prick her eyelids. Only de Bouille kept his countenance. He knew. He could *see*. Because Bertie was in his Sunday best! He had on a pair of light-brown boots, the same ragged trousers, but a loose check coat. He had no collar, but a tie, and in his hand a straw hat. There wasn't any Puck here, only a weedy, white-faced little Stepney rat.

Kariloff began to whimper:

'De Bouille, you great fool, how can I – *I* make music for you, when –'

'Now, shut it!' said de Bouille, and then to Bertie:

'Didn't I tell you to come as *you were*?'

'Well, guv'nor –' He shifted from one foot to another. Pearl caught her breath. 'Well, guv'nor, seeing as how you –'

Somebody just behind him stepped to the front. It was Lizzie.

'Come out of this, Bert. They're making fun of yer. Come out of it.'

She caught him by the shoulder and swung him round.

'Didn't I tell you?'

She was choking with anger. She shook her fist at de Bouille – yes, leant forward and shook it at London's greatest producer of the era.

'Comin' across 'im like that!' she said.

De Bouille got up.

'Now, you two –'

She wouldn't let him speak.

'Talk o' doing something for him!'

'Steady, Liz!'

'You 'old your mug, you shrimp. Doing something for him. So we comes along and spends three bob – yus, three – shiners to get him nice and neat – waste o' money. Didn't I say so? Out of this, Bertie.'

But de Bouille was in front of the door. He was smiling. He understood, you see.

'Yes, I know. Perfectly excusable, but I want him as he was last night. The *real* him. You get me?'

He argued, and argued, explained, grew angry, became sympathetic, and in the end got his own way. Lizzie was still unsatisfied, suspicious, but Bertie with his keen Cockney wit understood at length what was required of him. He left, saying he would return in an hour.

That was one of the longest and most difficult hours de Bouille had ever had. Lizzie sat down heavily on a chair and just glowered. Pearl fluttered about in a state of excitement. Kariloff tried to weep. Calmest among them was de Bouille. He could see the finished effect in the present chaos, could see the possibilities. He drummed on the desk with a pencil till Kariloff seized it and flung it into the paper basket. De Bouille merely shrugged his shoulders, and tried to draw out Lizzie. She was sullen and full of distrust. Every now and again she would catch her breath and give that terrible cough. It was all very trying.

But when Bertie came back de Bouille became galvanic. He shoved the desk clear and tossed a chair towards the piano. He even made Lizzie go to a corner of the room. Kariloff whined and wrung his hands. Bertie in the centre of the room, now thoroughly ill-kempt, his hands in his pockets, clicked his pennies.

'Oh, stop it!' cried Kariloff.

'Take no notice of him,' said de Bouille. He was the only person in London who'd have dared say it and then get away with it.

'Now you, Pearl – here.' He pointed at Lizzie. 'You're the stalls. No, sit still, woman. Pearl, you come in right-centre. There, so. Now you, young feller, got your pennies? Right. When I say go! Up with your skirts, Pearl. It's the Bridal Dance.'

He banged out that rare refrain on the trembling piano with murderous fingers.

Up-stage, Pearl. La-di-da-da. Now you, you Bertie – dance too, you little devil. La-di-da – no, blockhead, round this way –'

Pearl dancing and Bertie, first hesitant, then skipping in. Clicketty-click!

Kariloff, goggle-eyed, running to the piano, clawed de Bouille away.

'Aside, fat murderer! Now, now –'

He leant over the keyboard. He played nearly as well as he composed, did Kariloff. He cocked his head over his shoulder.

'No!'

He pushed Bertie aside.

'See. She dances and then you – you come in, clicketty-click – when I go like this.'

He leapt to the piano and forth there came a solemn mockery of Lizzie's air on the hurdy-gurdy.

'See – that is good.'

De Bouille grinned. He had won. He had got Kariloff. The musician was in a fever of excitement. Pearl was hot and bothered, Bertie enjoying himself. They were doing it a second time when Lizzie coughed. The pennies clattered on to the lino floor – Bertie was beside her.

'Liz, old girl!' He banged her back.

'Come, come!' screamed Kariloff.

'Liz!' He put his arm round her shoulders. 'Gawd,' he said, 'that cough tears her up properly.'

She pushed him away.

'I'm all right. Get out.'

But anybody could see how she loved him. De Bouille frowned.

An hour later they all left the office. Kariloff danced along.

'Ah, my friend, what a wonder you are!'

'I am,' said de Bouille.

That was the way then that Bertie Cumberlege was 'discovered.' The only person not crazy with joy was Lizzie.

III

Nobody nowadays remembers *The Faun*. They say it is going to be revived shortly. There is every reason why it should be. Its first production was a great success. But the public never knew why, after five weeks, it collapsed. It was Lizzie's fault and yet it wasn't. That is to say, de Bouille was up against something too big for him. At the same time he never reckoned with it, would not recognize it. He was too dogmatic and that, after all, is excusable in a man who deals day long, year long with human chattels, forcing them, bending them to his will. He under-estimated his opponent and thought it was Lizzie. Maybe it was Lizzie, or maybe it was something of which she was only the vehicle, that which is called Love. De Bouille had tabulated Love as he had tabulated, indeed had had to tabulate, everything. He thought it was a word, like many people do. You can dismiss words.

The operette was a success. It went with a bang. More rightly one might say it went with a click – the clicketty-click of Bertie's pennies. If you turn up the files of *The Times* of that date you'll see what I mean. In that notice there are a dozen lines devoted to Bertie and de Bouille.

In short, Bertie became famous.

He lived in what everyone conjectured must be Paradise for five weeks. It was an amazing experiment. What Bertie himself thought of it all no one knew till long afterwards, but at the time he seemed to enjoy himself thoroughly. He had no stage-fright.

His cockney impudence, encouraged, heightened by applause, carried him through everything. He was vulgar with the ripe seasoned vulgarity that knows no shame; a clean, vigorous vulgarity of the streets and their dwellers, homely, penetrating and showing in every gesture of his leaping figure.

And yet with it all, curiously enough, was a quality of faëry. He danced and clinked his pennies because he liked it and because, like a child, he loved admiration. He was a child and had, at times, queer, earnest moments, which de Bouille discouraged. He was hired to dance and not to think. But de Bouille reckoned without Pearl Adelaide. He knew Pearl as he knew the palm of his hand. Hard and bright and strong outside, but 'Shucks, inside she's mushy,' de Bouille would say. The trouble was, as de Bouille rightly conceived it, that Pearl thought her icy heart really was frozen. It was not. It was soft and ardent, and – a little limp.

He was shocked out of his pleasurable sense of success when Lizzie called on him at the Palais Royal, when the show had been running for two weeks.

She was more antagonistic than ever.

'I've come about my Bert.'

De Bouille lit a cigar.

'Well, what's the matter? Aren't you pleased with him? He's making ten jimmy-o'goblins a week.'

'Oh, I know all that. 'E sent me to a doctor las' week. My cough –'

She frowned.

'Balmy young fool; wasting his money on me. It isn't –'

'Well, isn't that as it should be? He does his best for you.'

'Oh, it ain't that.' She shifted her bulk on the chair. 'It ain't that. You see – Where's it all goin' to end?' she asked him.

'Nowhere if you're going to be a nuisance,' said de Bouille.

'Oh me?' she grimaced. 'I know all about that. I'm not wanted. It's all right for you, but what about me?'

'Bertie helps you.'

'Helps me? Blimey, of course he does. But I don't want *help*. I want *my Bert*.'

De Bouille was exasperated.

'Look here,' he said. 'This isn't my concern. But I'm not going to have my show spoilt because you're selfish. Bert isn't your sole property. He's got a mind of his own, I suppose? He's come to better things. Leave him alone. Let him have his chance. Do you want to do him down? Don't you think he's happier now?'

'I don't know. What's that to do with it? He's mine.'

'Shucks! He'll stick to you – if he *wants to*.'

'What j'er mean?'

'What I say.'

'He's been blabbing, has he, little swipe? What's he been saying? I'd like to know. I'll hammer him.'

'That's just the point,' said de Bouille. 'You would. Not likely he'll go back to that, is it?'

'What do you know, nosey? You don't know anything. 'E's fond of me, Bert is.'

'Well, we'll leave it at that,' said de Bouille.

He was quite satisfied with the argument, but he saw the danger. He took Bertie Cumberlege in hand. You understand, if Lizzie were to have her way, it wouldn't do *The Faun* any good. He did a deal of thinking and then made his plans. At this stage he was cold-blooded and scheming, but for all that right was on his side. If he wanted to get rid of Lizzie, it was all for Bertie's (and his own!) sake. He argued himself into the idea. Wasn't Bertie better off? Wasn't he learning every day? Hadn't he got his chance?

He spoke to Pearl about it. Pearl agreed.

'Take him about a bit, girlie. Show him what life's like. Clean him inside and out of his old ideas. Get him thinking on the right lines. *You* can do it. Well?'

'It'll be fun,' said Pearl.

IV

De Bouille may have been a scheming old rascal and Pearl a little devil, but putting morals aside, wasn't it all for Bertie's good? They set about the job thoroughly. De Bouille himself

spent hours in teaching him elocution; they took him to a tailor who made something of him; they encouraged the reporters. They had everything on their side – power, money, and Bertie's indebtedness.

To Pearl the whole affair was a great joke. She took Bertie up. She petted him and introduced him about the place, and because the thing was new and daring, people joined in. They made a fuss of Bertie. They found his self-consciousness and amazement at the glitter something at which to smile patronizingly. The women said Bertie was a scream, a curious epithet for one so childlike and shy. The men were not so kind to him. Meanwhile, *The Faun* was drawing the crowd on an enormous scale. De Bouille chuckled for joy.

None of them saw Lizzie again, though the doorkeeper said she was at the stage door each night. If you had passed by, down that narrow alley at the back of the Palais Royal, you would have seen her, a huge, gaunt figure just where the wall juts out on to the pavement and out of the light thrown slantwise across the street from the garage opposite. She would stand there with her handkerchief pressed against her mouth because her cough was that bad, the doorkeeper said, that you couldn't hear the traffic when she breathed.

She would wait there quite motionless, a huge, ominous shadow, till Bertie came out, generally with Pearl, and got into Pearl's car and drove away. She made no sign, but only clenched her great fists. 'Oh, I'll hammer 'im,' you might have heard her say. The tears would be streaming down her face, and she would swear at anybody who happened to be near. De Bouille or Pearl or anyone like that would have said she was there for revenge. She wasn't. There was something hideous about her agony. She was so big and slatternly and cruel – not fine and delicate like Pearl. If Pearl cried it wrung your heart. Lizzie only made you feel sick. It was such hopeless, animal misery, and in her clumsy form, ridiculous.

The doorkeeper, a family man, once tried to reason with her, but she turned on him with blind fury. He gave it up after that, and told the policeman to keep her away. But night after night she came. Then, when the lights were all gone, she would walk

back to Stepney, striding along, furious and anguished. They turned her out of her foul lodgings because she made such a din one night, sitting on the floor of her room, crying her heart out like a wounded beast. They thought she was drunk. So she was, with misery! They told her to quit the noise or get out. She slammed out of the house like a Fury and staggered into the East India Dock Road, sobbing horribly.

Still Pearl played her part, though she was beginning to find it difficult to remember it was only a part to be played. Bertie had queer ways with him; he would get tongue-tied and fumble with his cuffs, and then suddenly exclaim at some new wonder. Pearl was surprised she was not getting tired of the game. It seemed he was beginning to forget Lizzie and Stepney. He never mentioned her.

V

On the Saturday night of the fifth week and after the show, de Bouille went in search of Pearl. He wanted to give her a bit of supper. She was not in her dressing-room, and her dresser said she'd just left.

'With Mr. Cumberlege,' she added maliciously.

De Bouille strode down the passage, up the steps by the door-keeper's cubby-hole, and looked out into the street.

Pearl's car was alongside the kerb and Pearl was inside. Bertie was leaning through the window. He looked well enough in a dinner-jacket made by de Bouille's tailor. De Bouille swore under his breath. He had not seen much of Pearl lately. He heard Bertie say:

'Wouldn't be right for me ter come along, Pearl?'

A white hand came out of the car window and touched Bertie's cheek. Pearl said:

'Yes, Bertie. Do come.'

There are many ways of saying that. The way Pearl said it made de Bouille grow cold all over. Bertie was hesitating. De Bouille suddenly became angry. He had not meant Pearl to take things seriously, and as suddenly he cursed himself, remembering how mushy she was inside.

And then someone coughed, a tearing, sobbing sort of a cough. Bertie had jerked away from the car. He was peering into the shadows and he was saying:

'Liz! Liz! Is that you?'

His carefully cultured accent was gone. De Bouille stepped out on to the pavement. He saw a huge, gaunt figure step from the corner and come towards Bertie. He saw the movement, he heard the thud as she hit him. The blow caught him squarely at the side of the jaw – broke his collar. He staggered and spat.

'Liz, ole gal!'

He got another and doubled up with the pain of it. Then he got hold of her.

Whereupon he said a most remarkable thing. He did not even bother to wipe the blood off his mouth, he did not revile her. He just said, in most piteous tones:

'Oh, Gawd, that cough tears her up something cruel!'

He said it to no one in particular, unless it was to God. He had his arm round her now and she was crying shamelessly.

'Oh, I'll hammer you!' she said.

'That's all right,' he kept murmuring. 'That's all right.'

And then they were off down the street, arm-in-arm, before Pearl was out of the car and de Bouille beside her.

They never found them, and Bertie never came back.

All that night de Bouille sat up with Pearl.

'It's all my fault – I deserve it,' she kept saying. She never cried. She sat on de Bouille's knee and talked and talked.

'It serves me right,' she said a hundred times. But when morning came she whispered: 'And he'll never come back. Oh, Jumbo! I did so want him.'

That, then, was why *The Faun* failed. De Bouille dropped a pretty penny, as he termed it. It would have been too much to ask of Luck to find another Bertie.

But de Bouille saw him again, once only, and three years later. There was no sort of difference in the East India Dock Road, in the lights and shades and wicked odours. The light still came white and ugly through the windows of the corner public-house, a ragged spot-light to illumine the same old pitch, the same old

dance, Bertie with his clinking coins; and at the hurdy-gurdy Lizzie, full of hate renewed when she saw de Bouille.

De Bouille said:

'You won't come back, Bertie?'

Bertie shook his head.

'Why not?'

'Well, Liz and me – I'm fond of her.'

And last words of all:

'What's it like to be in love, Bertie?'

He scratched his head, looked up, looked down, looked at Lizzie.

'Oh, well,' he said, 'it's a kind of freedom.'

The Lock

BY EDWARD SACKVILLE WEST

Hat der Geber nicht zu danken, dass der Nehmende nahm? Ist Schenken nicht eine Nothdurft? Ist Nehmen nicht Erbarmen?

NIETZSCHE: *Zarathustra*

I

FROM the wheel-studded bridge above the entrance to the lock a tall young man was waving them back. His movements produced an agitation on the part of Christine Sorme and her father, who between them were steering the boat; so that the two boys who were sculling looked anxiously at them for orders, their sculls held ready to grip the water.

'You'd better back water, I think,' said Christine in an uncertain voice. 'He seems to think we are too near the gates.' She pulled first one rudder-string and then the other, causing the boat to swing from side to side with a swish of water.

The voice of the young man came calling to them from the bridge. 'That's far enough!' it said. In the still air of the hot July afternoon the sound seemed muffled, so that it was impossible for the occupants of the boat to distinguish what sort of voice it was that had spoken.

The two boys stopped sculling and looked round at the lock, allowing their sculls to float idly on the surface of the water. They were two very ordinary-looking boys of fifteen or sixteen, wearing grey flannel trousers and thin cotton vests.

The young man on the bridge had begun to open the lock. Taking one of the wheels between his hands, he spun it rapidly round and the low wooden growling was followed instantly by the gurgle of the water welling up from the open sluices. The whirlpool bubbled and seethed and glittered in the sunlight, making the boat rock about and the sculls bump against the rowlocks. Christine, holding on to the side of the boat, watched the figure on the bridge walking to and fro and managing the wheels.

At length the whirlpool ceased to froth and bubble and, walking to the end of the huge oar which stuck out from one side of the

gate, the young man began to push it. Christine watched him as he moved slowly forward, his head bent between his two arms, his hands clutching powerfully at the wooden bar. Slowly one side of the gate opened, disclosing the green, dripping, aquarium-like interior of the lock. Without waiting for orders the two boys began to scull carefully, and gradually the boat drifted in between the thick wooden gates. The boys whispered together and steered the boat with their strokes, for it was clear to them that their housemaster's daughter was not paying attention to their job. Once inside, they shipped their sculls with a clatter and sat waiting, looking vaguely about them, at the sides of the lock, the flights of stone steps, the grass, and the cottage standing on the tiny island between the lock and the weir, the rushing of which could be heard in the near distance.

When he had shut the gate, the young man came down the steps in the side of the lock and stopped by the boat.

'Sixpence, please,' he said.

Christine looked up at him as her father handed the sixpence. She had been a little surprised by the tone of his voice. He had wiry dark hair that came down over one side of his forehead, a square face, half-shut eyes that seemed like thick lines under his eyebrows, and a large, rather soft-looking mouth. His voice had seemed to lack 'edge'; there was something flabby about it that made Christine look twice at the half-shut eyes and the soft, beautiful mouth. He stood balancing himself easily on the narrow step and tearing a little pink ticket out of a book. This he gave to Mr. Sorme, who flapped it in the water and stuck it on to the inner side of the boat.

Christine wished that the young man would speak again. She wanted to be sure about that voice. It did not fit, somehow, those very muscular arms and that big body.

'You are new here, aren't you?' said Mr. Sorme suddenly, to the young man.

'Yes, sir.'

'Are you alone?'

'Yes, sir.'

'When did you come?'

'Thursday, sir.'

'I see. Well – good luck!' The patronage of the schoolmaster was never long absent from even Mr. Sorme's voice.

The young man left the steps and going to the opposite end of the lock began to open the sluices. Gradually the boat rose on the welling surface of the water. One after another Christine watched the steps disappear under the rising flood, until at last the boat was on a level with the top. She thought how different everything looked, now that the lock was full, from when it was empty. The gloomy aquarium had been exchanged (and how insensibly!) for a small swimming-bath, the water of which glinted blindingly in the sun. The transformation was magical and full of beauty. The boat seemed to have been lifted into another and more lovely world, where the tall elms, wilting in the heat, seemed nearer and more luscious in the thickness of their foliage, and the sky an even purer blue than before.

Then the far gate opened and the boat, propelled by a boat-hook in the hands of Mr. Sorme, sped out up-stream into the river beyond. When they were clear of the lock, Christine looked back at the young man, who was watching them go, his hands still gripping the bar of the gate. His face now told her nothing: it was completely expressionless – and peaceful, like an animal's. Then his powerful figure turned and walked back towards the cottage, bending slightly forward in movement.

About half a mile farther up-stream the boat was moored to the bank and the party prepared a picnic among the long grasses under the elms. These picnics were considered a great treat by the boys in Mr. Sorme's house. About twice in the course of the summer term he would send for two of his pupils unexpectedly and ask them if they would care to go on the river with him that afternoon. He always made the offer as if the expedition were an intolerable bore which the boys would undoubtedly refuse and never failed to seem surprised at the delight with which they invariably accepted. He always took his daughter with him to contribute to the liveliness of the occasion. The picnic part of the expedition was generally the least successful. The uneasy familiarity between master and pupil in so artificial a situation could scarcely be called

a pleasure to either. Mr. Sorme was one of the best and most popular masters in the school and he was always ready to talk to his boys in a way that interested them. But he always remained their housemaster and did not try to establish that ridiculous and false relation of 'friend and equal' which many masters mistakenly suppose to be the key to success in that calling. He never forgot that familiarity breeds contempt.

So that the boys could not, even when lying on the grass under the elms, far from the school itself, dismiss the feeling that if they talked to each other they would be reprimanded for wasting time in school, or that such conversation would be in some way a betrayal of themselves to the enemy that lurks in even the most popular master.

Christine they respected and liked but did not understand. The reason for this was that she was not really in the least interested in *them*. She had no part in their life, nor in the life of the school itself; they knew this and, without exactly resenting it, excluded her as much as possible from the range of their thoughts. She was not part of the school; they did not 'place' her; she belonged to a part of their housemaster's life into which they had no intention of prying – his life of the holidays, so different in every human quality from that of the term. They connected themselves – their real selves – with her no more than they connected her father with their own sisters.

The tea was good and there was much of it. In particular a new plum-cake attracted the boys, but seeing they had already eaten a great deal, Mr. Sorme suggested that it would be a pity to cut the cake.

This sort of thing annoyed Christine.

'Nonsense!' she said sharply, and cut three slices there and then, taking one of them herself and pushing the cake over to the boys.

Mr. Sorme smiled vaguely through his pince-nez and indulged in a joke about the necessity of economy and the extravagance of his daughter. The boys laughed self-consciously and felt nervous at this sudden intrusion of an intimate note they did not approve of. (On no account must the holidays quality be allowed to encroach on the term-time.)

At length Mr. Sorme raised his huge length from the ground and indicated that it was time to pack up and start for home. Whispering together, the boys packed the crumpled paper, the thermos, the enamel cups, and the remains of the food into the basket and carried it to the boat.

Christine stood at the water's edge, motionless and paying no attention to anything. The boys were used to this form of passivity on her part and tried to seem as if they were not there. In the dining-hall of the house she sat next to her father, surrounded by the older boys. Sometimes she made an effort to talk to them, but more often she would sit silent through an entire meal, looking at them from time to time as they talked to each other or to her father, as if making of them inanimate objects with which to piece together and vitalize thoughts that had nothing to do with them. Their figures would stand about in the images of her mind like statues, trees, pillars, round which the infinite agonies of her soul swirled and from which they took their quality and their intensity.

She was now, in 1925, twenty-eight years old. Her mother had died two years before the War, leaving her to take care of her father. Up till the time of the War she had been an old-fashioned type of child, living somewhat obscurely in the affections of her parents and demanding no other satisfaction. She did not seem particularly interested in men, and the younger masters in the school did not commonly look upon her in the light of a potential wife. It was not that she was cold or inhuman, but they divined in her a strange, secret fear, which they dared not risk arousing. Even her parents she kept at arm's length, in terror of how too emotional a relationship between them and herself might affect her attitude toward them. She dared not think about love; it turned her innermost heart into a furnace of resentment. She felt that something of her essential self was being made responsible in spite of herself for another soul that she did not understand and could never know.

When the War came she took up various employments of a mildly patriotic nature, grew rather hard and mechanical in her manner, and eventually, towards the end of the War, insisted on

going to live in London to work in a large munition canteen. During the year that she was there she returned only once to see her father, and he was shocked by the change in her. He thought her hysterical, and was irritated and distressed to observe that everything she said seemed to contain an over-statement. He said she looked ill and tired and did his best to persuade her to leave the canteen and return to his house. The only result of this was that she left for London early the next morning, almost without saying good-bye to him.

Then there occurred what families call a 'regrettable incident' and a 'sad affair.' The female cousin with whom Christine was living wrote to Mr. Sorme that his daughter was seeing altogether too much of a certain officer. She did not give his name, but lamented the affair and said that she was powerless to do anything, as Christine had flown into a temper on the only occasion on which she had dared to expostulate with her on the subject. Mr. Sorme wrote to his daughter but got no reply. Then the cousin wrote again (the letter was marked *Private* and *Express*). It appeared that Christine had run away with the young man, – she had no idea where. What should she do? Mr. Sorme, knowing his daughter better than the cousin, advised no steps whatever and took none himself. Ten days or so passed; then Christine suddenly appeared at her father's house, alone. Making no reference to her strange behaviour, Mr. Sorme asked her if she intended to remain. She said yes – and sent to London for her clothes.

So nothing more was said, and Christine continued to live at home as if nothing had happened. But since that time her moods of silence had been more frequent and the fear that could be seen in her face on these occasions became more and more deep-seated – became a sort of obsession with her. No one questioned her; no one knew anything about her. The masters' wives and the matrons of the various houses came to tea with her and went away annoyed and uncomfortable, uncertain within themselves of the security of their own relationships, unable to shut their eyes to the intense fear and hatred of life that looked out at them over the top of the tea-kettle.

For the rest, she was helpful enough. She managed her father's

side of the house and left the boys entirely to the care of the matron, who was more than competent to discharge this duty and was grateful to Christine for taking at least some of the burden of housekeeping off her shoulders.

But Christine was not satisfied. She knew that her father was afraid of her and she reproached herself for allowing this state of affairs to come to pass. But each time she decided to make a change, – to appear more human and appreciative of him, the fear that vibrated in her soul like a taut wire threatened to break and destroy her. Like a bell sunk in the sea she could hear the low note sounding ceaselessly within her from day to day. Then, after a time, she ceased to think of her dissatisfaction until it eventually became merged within the great fear that possessed her soul and formed the guiding principle of her life.

When the boys had packed the basket under the seat and settled themselves at the sculls, Mr. Sorme and his daughter got into the boat and they set off home. They did not go back through the lock, for Mr. Sorme wished to leave the boat at a river-side boat-builder's, to have something done to the rowlocks.

They walked home through the fields, the two boys padding along together behind them in their rubber-soled shoes, whispering together as they had done the whole afternoon.

II

The next morning at breakfast Mr. Sorme suggested to his daughter that she should walk over to the lock cottage and see if she could help the young man in any way.

'He seemed quite alone there, as he said. He ought to have some one to look after the cottage. If there turns out to be no one, you might try and find a motherly woman of some kind to come in by the day.'

Christine smiled at the 'motherly woman' and said she would do as he asked. The matter seemed to be weighing on her father's mind; she knew he could not bear to think of anyone, even a young man, having to look after himself.

On her way to the cottage she met a crowd of boys issuing from

various schoolrooms. Those of them who knew her by sight took off their hats as they passed, others did not. In either case she hardly noticed them: they represented nothing for her. She did not even wish now that she could be of help to them in the progress of their lives.

A little farther on she met the headmaster, a tall figure, his black silk gown billowing in the wind. He asked her where she was going and seemed pleased when she told him. 'You and your father are very kind,' he said. 'The young man is the son of my father's old butler. I got him the job. Did he look as if he were enjoying it? I haven't had time yet to go and see for myself.'

Christine did not know how to answer. She had no idea whether the young man had looked as if he were happy or not. She had not looked at him for knowledge of that sort.

On her way out of the old school-buildings and down through the elm-planted fields to the river, Christine began to feel unhappy. She forced herself to admit that she didn't in the least want to be kind to the young man. She was sure that he did not want kindness – did not, above all, want interference and this was what she doubted her ability to conceal on the present occasion. Her father, who never really looked at anyone, always had a sentimental feeling that every young man was in some way pathetic and 'ought to be helped.' That he was wrong in this case she knew by instinct. Yet she wished, up to a point, to do what pleased him; feeling that this was the least she could do, in the position she had assumed with regard to him.

As she crossed over the narrow bridge over the lock, she laid her hand for a moment on the sluice-wheel, wondering if it were very hard to turn. Looking down, she saw that the lock was full to the brim, like a cup. There were no boats in it, and the water was smooth and glassy, reflecting the dark-green masses of the elm foliage stretched above it on the river bank. The day was going to be hotter than ever.

She was approaching the cottage door, which was open, when the young man walked through it on to the grass by the lock-steps and stood looking at her. She felt as if something had suddenly gone out of joint inside her and she could not move.

So she stood at some distance from him, looking hesitatingly at his face, in which the perpetually half-shut eyes were again like two level brown smudges under the square white forehead.

He was the first to speak.

'Good morning, Miss,' he said, 'did you want anything?'

'My father –' she began and stopped. Then she went on: 'The headmaster, Mr. Pomfret, told me you were new here and quite alone. I wondered if you wanted anything . . . if I could . . . I mean. . . .' She stopped again and did not move from where she was standing. She felt a sharp stone under her foot, but still did not move.

The young man walked up to her and for the first time his eyes opened on to her face. She saw that they were quiet and untroubled as the water in the lock – as the surface of wine in a wide glass.

'Thank you very much, Miss, but I don't know that I want anything. Mrs. Roberts does it all; I don't worry.' The large soft flower of his mouth stretched in a huge smile, which would have been a grin but for something fundamentally and instinctively discerning which placed it outside the limits of the merely foolish.

Christine was forced to return his smile, and this seemed to relieve the tension within herself. She peered through the door into the dark interior of the cottage.

'You like it here, then?' she said, trying hard not to seem patronizing.

'It's all right,' he answered. 'There's not much to do, though.'

'You mind that?'

'It makes it dull, sometimes.'

She leant her hand for a moment against the lintel of the door. 'Don't you know anyone?'

'Not yet.'

She laughed at that. 'You sound as if you didn't want to.'

But he did not smile as he had done before.

'Perhaps I don't,' he said; then, hearing a shout, he turned round and saw a boat waiting to enter the lock.

'Sorry, Miss, but I must go now,' he said.

But Christine followed him as he went to the bar to push the gate open.

'I'm afraid I don't even know your name,' she said.

He looked up at her, his body strained forward, his head between his broad white arms. His eyes were wide open now.

'Barlet, Miss.'

'Barlet.' She repeated the word after him, but continued to look at him, so that he felt obscurely that she wished for something more.

'Yes. Frank Barlet,' he added and began to walk forward, pushing the bar before him.

She watched his hands and the muscles moving underneath the skin of his arms, like a carpet under which the wind blows. Then she turned and recrossed the bridge to the river bank. She did not look back, unable to bear the thought that, were she to do so, she might find that he was not looking after her.

III

Later on the same day Mr. Sorme asked Christine if she had been to the lock-cottage.

'Yes,' she said. 'His name is Barlet, he doesn't seem to want any help. There is already a 'motherly woman' who comes in by the day. *Her* name is Mrs. Roberts.'

Mr. Sorme laughed. 'You seem to have found out quite a lot. Is he a talkative man, Mr. Barlet?'

'He answered my questions.' Christine could not prevent her voice from sounding snappy; yet she did not know why it annoyed her to speak on the subject.

Turning round, she looked at the image of her face in a glass hanging on the wall. She looked into her eyes – large and grey-blue, with none of the opacity and animal passivity of the young lock-keeper's. Images of wrath threatened her from the distances behind the pupils. 'Keep away! Keep away!' But her eyes continued to hold their reflection as if linked together by hollow cylinders. Resentment took its place by the side of wrath, but still she looked. One by one the moving forces of her emotional life

came into serried ranks at the very end and limit of her vision. Then slowly they sank away, leaving a void to be filled, perhaps, by something even more terrible. Her eyes quitted their reflection.

Her father had gone out of the room and soon Christine went to sit alone in the garden behind the house. There she was joined by the matron, who was evidently in the mood for talking. A straightforward type of woman, she was one of the few people who were not intimidated by Christine, nor felt behind her quiet manner a menace to their own peace of mind. She chattered on now about the exorbitant price of meat, the necessity of keeping down the house-books, and kindred subjects, failing to notice that Christine was not listening to her.

The latter was completely lost in the torment she had fashioned for herself. She knew that quite soon she would certainly go again to see Frank Barlet, but she did not want to think about it in the interval. But her will was not powerful enough to prevent her from inventing for herself every detail of their future meeting, though she knew that the inevitable falsification of the imagined rencontre by the real one would plunge her into despair; and this even though the reality might be just as satisfactory as the fantasy. All her life she had been unable for one instant to live in the present, and in this inability, she knew, lay the cause of her unhappiness.

For two days she fought with herself, striving to leave the future unpredicted, lacerating her soul until she could bear it no longer. She must test her vision one way or the other. On the fourth day she went down to the river and took a boat, choosing a moment in the early afternoon when all the boys were at work.

She was physically strong and rowed well and swiftly, though somewhat spasmodically. As she neared the lock she looked round and saw Frank Barlet standing outside the door of the cottage smoking a pipe. She did not look round again until she was near the tall black gates. Then she turned in her seat and called to him to let her into the lock.

Making no sign that he recognized her, he went to the bridge and began to let the water out of the lock.

When she was inside he came down the steps and found her

tying the boat up to a chain. He stopped short and looked down at her hands.

'What are you doing that for, Miss?'

Christine's forehead contracted in a nervous moment. Already the vision was being falsified. She had not accounted for the 'Miss.'

'I thought I'd stay here for a little – if you'll let me,' she said. 'I feel rather tired.'

The young man continued to look down at her, evidently puzzled.

'Just as you like,' he said and, to Christine's consternation, began to remount the steps. She wanted to stop him – to keep him with her – but could not bring herself to say the words.

So she sat quite still in the boat, her sculls shipped and her hands clasping her knees, looking up the green slimy wall at a space in front of the cottage, where Frank was weeding desultorily in a bed of straggling flowers.

'What shall I say now?' she thought. 'Shall I say, "D'you like flowers?" No. That sounds much too silly. Oh, why doesn't he come here, so that I shan't have to shout!'

After a few more moments of hesitation she climbed out of the boat and walked up the steps.

Frank looked up from his weeding. He was wearing the same clothes as before, except that now he wore a broad leather belt round the top of his trousers. This in Christine's observant eyes, made a difference. The emasculate look of his mouth was successfully counterbalanced. He stood and looked at her, his long body slightly balanced backwards, a trowel in one hand. It seemed to Christine that the sight of one another passed slowly between them with the speed only of sound, rather than with that of light.

The afternoon, which was cloudy, weighed heavily upon the world. The only sound was the continuous rushing of the weir behind the cottage.

Now Christine said what she had feared would sound silly if she were to shout it.

'Do you like flowers?'

'They brighten things up,' he answered.

'Oh, Lord!' was her immediate reaction to this, though she did not voice it.

But there was better to come.

'I like Sweet Williams,' he continued, rather firmly, as if defending an unreasonable preference. 'Do you think I could get any?'

She snatched this up crudely.

'Yes. There are lots in my own garden. I'll bring you some if you like.'

'I don't think I ought to take them away from you, Miss.'

('Miss' again!)

'Nonsense,' she said, almost angrily. 'I'll bring them to you – to-morrow.'

He looked pleased. 'Don't hurry yourself. You're very kind.'

But she disregarded this. 'I'll bring them to-morrow,' she repeated.

It seemed as if a bolt had been shot in her mind and that now she might be at peace for a few hours. Something at least was settled – certain. She had got what she wanted, and it was sufficiently different from what she had expected to prevent the sense of defeat she usually felt at the falsification of her predictions.

But Frank Barlet was saying something. 'Do you live at the school, Miss?'

'Yes,' she answered. 'That was my father you saw with me the other day. He has a house.'

'I've not been up to the school yet.' He spoke in a meditative tone, looking down at the trowel and turning it over in his hands.

Christine looked at his hair – the way in which it was parted – and met the square white field of his forehead, as though photographing it with her eyes.

'But I thought your father used to live there,' she said, remembering the headmaster's remark about his father's old butler.

Frank looked up from contemplating the trowel.

'That was before I was born,' he said. 'But I'd like to see it. Some time I'll go.' His heavily lashed eyelids trembled together

with the passive animal pleasure of his indolent nature. 'You wouldn't remember my father, would you, Miss?'

'No. I suppose I must often have seen him, when I was a child. But I don't remember. Is he – is he still alive?'

'Oh yes, Miss, he's still alive. But he's very old now.'

'Did you mind leaving him?'

Frank paused a moment without moving. Then his eyes opened wide. 'I don't know that I did,' he replied.

Christine collected herself. 'I must be going now,' she said. 'Thank you for letting me talk to you.'

'The pleasure is mine,' he said stiffly, in a rather foolish attempt at the grand manner.

Unable to bear him in this character, Christine ran swiftly down the steps into the boat and pushed herself out through the still open gates. When well outside she stopped to wave to him. He saluted her with the trowel.

IV

Such was her opportunity and she made the most of it, going almost every day to help in the improvement of the tiny garden. She brought the Sweet Williams and together they planted them, passing the single trowel from one to the other.

Once, when he held out his hand, palm-downward, for the trowel, she did not give it to him at once, but remained still, looking down at his hand. Suddenly it appeared easy to her to say what was in her mind. 'You have beautiful hands.' She did not look up at him and slowly she handed him the trowel, watching his fingers close over the handle. He himself did not speak, and she felt, as he dug a hole and put in the plant, that he was burying unuttered words along with the scrannel root.

Soon he became used to her constant visits and, while continuing obviously puzzled by them, ceased to preserve in his manner any of the constraint he had at first showed. He never seemed surprised to see her, and after a time she became convinced that he was glad in her presence. Often she would arrive when he was occupied in opening or shutting the lock; then she would wait for

him in the garden, pretending to inspect the growth of the plants, but in reality watching his every movement until he turned to come toward her.

Sometimes people from the school passed in boats or on the bank, and she waved to them unembarrassedly. She knew they would soon begin to gossip about her – had probably begun already – but she did not care. Her love and her fear were all she could think of.

One day he left her to let a small steamboat pass through the lock and on turning to come back found her beside him on the path. She was looking very searchingly at him in a way he did not understand and which made him feel self-conscious and stupid. He fidgeted where he stood, not liking to move away.

Suddenly Christine spoke, and her voice made him start, so hard and metallic was it.

'Frank! Do you mind my coming here so much?'

It pleased her immeasurably to see that he instantly looked straight at her instead of avoiding her eyes, as she had feared he would do.

'No,' he said, 'I like it.' He hesitated a moment, then: 'But I don't know why you come. I don't know why you take so much interest in me or trouble yourself with my garden.'

She looked at him, half laughing.

'Oh! Frank, what's to be done with you? Are you a stupid man?'

'Quite stupid,' he answered at once.

She turned half away from him as he continued to speak.

'I don't understand what it is you want of me, Miss. What is it? Tell me.'

'Perhaps I don't want anything,' she answered. 'What then?'

'Then . . . I don't know . . .' His voice sounded perplexed and worried.

Suddenly she flung round angrily at him.

'At least I want you to stop calling me "Miss." '

She had expected that he would be surprised – even shocked; but he only looked quietly back into her angry eyes.

'What am I to call you, Miss?'

'Christine.'

'Very well.'

Then she saw how easy it had been to shoot a bolt in that simple mind. Their love was with them, seated in hiding – like the soul – in their foreheads between their eyes.

And seeing what she had done, she began to fear him.

She became afraid of silence. She would talk for the sake of talking, about the school, – about anything but herself. Once, from sheer nervousness, her brain, like a rope that is twisted until it will twist no more, refused to go on providing remarks. 'I can think of no more news for you,' she said. 'Never mind, then,' he answered quietly, 'talk to me about yourself.'

She looked at him in astonishment.

'Oh, my dear Frank, what have you ever wanted to know about me?'

It was true. Her presence seemed sufficient for him; he was entirely uncurious about her *self*. Her real thoughts and emotions, those that were outside the range of what immediately affected his relations with her (on his side so simple and direct) held no sort of interest for him. In her way, the honest Mrs. Roberts knew more than he did. This fact was a continual anxiety to Christine, who felt that, were any kind of crisis to arise, she would be unable to make Frank understand her difficulties. 'I ought to have kept away,' she said to herself.

The days passed, and her fear and her desire became more and more poignant and hard to bear. One night she dreamt she was standing at the end of a track suspended in the air. The track was absolutely straight and narrowed into a point like railway lines. When she started to walk along it she found that the deceit of her vision had become a reality; the track really became narrower and narrower – became a knife-edge, upon which she had to balance herself.

In other ways the sense of difference between them gradually faded. Their intimacy deepened. Christine began to feel happy. As time went on the fear that possessed her retreated somewhat, leaving room for more balanced thoughts and judgments.

At the end of July the school broke up for the summer holidays, but Christine persuaded her father to stay on in the house. They

had arranged to go down to some relations in Somerset, but Christine urged that they could go later. She could not bear the thought of leaving Frank Barlet just at that moment. Mr. Sorme gave in.

As August went on, the days became heavier, stagnant, overripe. A blackish hue infused itself into the green of the trees and grasses; the water in the lock became oily and sluggish, the air hot and motionless over the low-lying fields. Christine began to feel the serenity she had found disturbed. In her heart the melancholy song of summer was coming to an end in a cadence of warning. 'You are trying to cheat life of its true fulfilment,' it sang, 'you are dislocating its rhythm. It will get the better of you, and then you will be sorry.' She spent more and more time at the lock; still her father said nothing, though she knew that many people must have given him the broadest hints. She was grateful to him for his reticence, but at the same time took it as a matter of course and acknowledged to herself that she would have been surprised and furious had he attempted to break it.

The garden of the lock had by now begun to assume an almost grand appearance. Christine delighted in it, building it up day by day in a feverish attempt to make of it an elaborate defence. It came really to symbolize for her the serenity she desired and knew she could not preserve. Frank, knowing nothing of these secrets, watched her with a certain astonishment.

One evening, about six o'clock, he went to open the lock; Christine left the garden for the back of the cottage. She stood looking at the weir, which seemed to be running with less than its usual violence. She watched the oily downward curve of the water, combed by the teeth of the weir – a dribbling mouth. On the opposite bank a little white dog was snuffling about near the water's edge: it disappeared in the long grass. A slight breeze wound itself about the inner stillness of the evening.

When Christine heard the slow footsteps of Frank Barlet coming round the end of the cottage, she did not move or look round. He came and stood behind her and she knew that he was looking at her. Suddenly it seemed to her that she knew what was going to happen – knew for certain that at last she was inventing an image

that would become a reality with every detail correct and in its place. She turned round away from Frank and, walking to a bench placed along the wall of the cottage, sat down upon it. Frank came and sat beside her; the two worlds were fitting into one another with a poignant exactitude. Quite slowly he put his arms round her and she felt his face pressed into her shoulder near to her neck. Still she remained rigid, gazing in front of her at the leaves of the elms shivering from light to darkness against the pale sky, marvelling in a painful ecstasy at the completion of her image. Now that it was fulfilled, for the first time in her life she realized that an end – however temporary, still an end – of her predictions had come. She was living now in the present; the future had ceased to exist; all was at the present.

Frank lifted his head. 'You don't mind, do you?' he said, but before she could answer he had kissed her on the mouth. His lips remained upon hers. Her open eyes followed the close line of his temple out to the square line of his hair.

Suddenly he let her go and she stood up, laying her hand upon his head.

'I must go now,' she said quietly. 'I will come to-morrow.'

He did not seem to have heard her speak and made no movement when she left him.

Directly she got home and realized that she was away from him, all the horror revived. The peculiar sense of 'awayness' that was present in her in an exaggerated degree, seemed now to emphasize her isolation even when in his arms. She began to dread the future of their love, to explore unwillingly the unlighted possibilities of a new sort of intimacy. She knew also that she could not escape an explanation of her feelings – such, at any rate, as she had left, yet her brain could conceive no means whereby to make them intelligible to him, for to the simple all things are either simple or – nothing. What she would say to him would – she knew it fatally – produce a mere blank in his mind. Yet she must speak, if only to guard herself against regret.

She could not bring herself to see him again until the evening of the following day. When she came to the lock she saw him standing in the garden, a tall, straight, watching figure, as if he

had waited for her all day. At the sight of him watching there she began to feel sorrow. He saw her coming towards him over the narrow bridge, but he did not move to meet her. He waited, as still and straight as the cottage beside him – as the small rose-tree Christine had planted. She felt herself watched and every movement of her body accomplished itself in an agony of consciousness. She clutched in her mind for support, to the sluice-wheels, to the elms behind her head, to the one cloud in the evening sky. And she knew herself walking forward, approaching a body she feared and loved, – a thing of beauty and of horror.

When she reached his side he did not speak, but smiled his wide smile and drew her behind the cottage. There he put his arms round her and kissed her once, easily and beautifully. For one second – only that – she knew happiness for the second time. He let her go, then put his hands on to her arms, to hold her there where she was. He seemed to value her stillness.

'I was afraid you wouldn't come after all,' he said.

She did not answer, but saw reflected in his eyes the motions of his mind following the thoughts she did not utter.

'I was afraid,' he went on, 'that you'd be sorry for what you'd done – for what I'd done.'

Still she did not speak.

'Now I know I was wrong. I'm glad.' He spoke like a child.

Then he came nearer to her again and his hands moved round her shoulders. She felt the bones of his arms pressed hard and suddenly against her.

'Why won't you speak to me?' he asked.

Then he kissed her and felt the line of her mouth closed firm and hard in a determination of which he had suspected nothing.

He drew back and looked at her in surprise. 'What's the matter?' he said.

At last she spoke to him. 'You love me and I want your love. You want to possess me and I want that, too. But if it happens . . . I shall never want to see you again.'

'I don't understand what you mean,' he said stonily. 'Why could you never see me again? I should have thought –'

'You would be wrong,' she interrupted him, in a firm voice.

'You know nothing of me and of what I feel beyond the love I show you. How should you understand?'

'Understand what?'

'That then I should fear you as one fears the monsters of one's dreams. When I was away from you I could not think of you as I do now. The thought of your existence apart from me – torn away from me – would make your image frightful to me. Even when you were present I could not endure the sense of your triumph.'

'I still don't understand.'

'Then you must be content to think me mad.'

Again she left him and again he let her go, searching in the blindness of his soul for the reason of her going.

V

On the way home an image of the future did not become clear to her. Her mind was led by diverse paths, hither and thither, seeking – not an outlet – but a centre wherein to rest. 'How can he accept what to him must seem mad, – crazy? What *is* mad and crazy! I ought to have kept away. Now I shall destroy both of us.'

After dinner her father remained standing in front of a book-case instead of immediately subsiding into a chair, as he usually did. His jerry-built figure waved on his feet like the limbs of a puppet and Christine could hardly see his eyes, behind the thick glass of his pince-nez. His aspect made her feel uneasy.

'What is it, father?' she asked, a little impatiently.

Mr. Sorme blew down his nose, a trick he had when feeling nervous. 'Don't frown, my dear. I'm not angry,' he began. After another look at his daughter he turned his eyes to the ground and went on speaking very fast, so as to leave her no time to interrupt him.

'It isn't that I mind, my dear. The young man is no doubt very well in his way and I have nothing to say against your knowing him and seeing as much of him as you have a mind to. I repeat, it is not I that mind. But others are less tolerant, Christine. My principle has always been to leave you alone. I would have

appreciated this, but some – not necessarily myself – would say that you were presuming on my reticence. It has indeed been said –'

'What has been said?' Christine's voice was tired and bored. It seemed to her that she had enough to bear without this.

'That you are in love with the young man. For myself I have always thought that to be the case, but,' his voice became petulant, 'it is intolerably annoying to me that you should give others the opportunity of saying so. That is what I really mind. The first time it was a different matter –'

'What first time?' With horror in her eyes Christine rose out of her chair and stood in front of him, striving to see into his eyes. But Mr. Sorme did not seem to see her face at all, so absorbed was he becoming in the expression of his vexation.

'Don't say, "What first time?" like that, Christine. You know perfectly well the occasion to which I refer. I never once reproached you or asked from you an explanation of that extraordinary incident. But now it is, as I have said, a different matter. You cannot go on in this way!'

At last he took off his pince-nez to give his daughter the benefit of an angry stare; but she had left his side and was standing some way off between the French windows, with her back to the room. There was silence and then Christine spoke.

'You ought not to have said it, father!' Her voice was full of sadness. 'You've spoilt it all now. You've shot more bolts than you know of! I have lived for years on the memory of your reticence. It was a beautiful thing, for which you had all my love and gratitude. But now you have undone it all and we have nothing left worth preserving between us. That you should have spoken of your annoyance on this occasion goes for nothing, it would not have altered anything. But that you should have betrayed yourself into breaking faith with your heart's deepest honesty, – that has taken from me the power to care how I act.'

She turned round and walked slowly across the room. Near to her father she stopped suddenly and made a gesture in the air with her hand as one who should prevent an overbalanced chair from toppling over. Her face became painfully drawn.

'Oh! father, why did you do this?'

Mr. Sorme looked nothing more than put out. 'I do not see that anything I've said can make any difference you describe so obscurely. Your exaggeration is ridiculously unbalanced.'

It was ten o'clock and the room was nearly dark, Mr. Sorme in his annoyance having omitted to turn on any of the lights. He did so now, with a sharp movement which, together with the accompanying click of the switch, made (to his mind) an effective end of the conversation. Saying that he had a great many letters to write and implying by his tone that this was Christine's fault, he went briskly out of the room.

After a moment or two she followed him, leaving the door open and the light burning. Going into the outer hall she put on a coat and left the house.

The objects of the external world now became a menace to her, instead of a consolation. The light and shadows in the roadway, the bricks of an arch and a tower, all retired into and formed part of the night that was herself. She had no scaffolding for her thoughts. Stars lit her face, but no moon. The long low wall of a playground, like a black mirror reflecting the night sky, continued for her the thought: 'This will be for the last time.'

And then, as the elms began to group themselves in dark silent masses about her moving form, – dispersing and coming together like shapes of mist, – it was: 'Surely, surely that should be over and done with. Can one die more than twice and yet suffer a third death?' Some words, – futile and comfortless, – she spoke aloud: the leaves and the grass received and wrapped them into themselves for ever. A night stiller than any day awaited a breaking life. A memory of some years before came back to her with more violence than ever, but she strove with it and beat it away, – in the darkness, under the elms near the river. The longing to be made to do something against her will possessed her completely. Knowing that an ultimate fear awaited her, she was careless of herself as to the present, feeling that, having so much (or so little) to evade the fear, she might now rest upon her weakness. Her father's having failed her made almost any action easy of execution.

As she found her way on to the lock bridge and looked down into the enormous ink-pot of the lock below her, as she watched the reflected stars glittering motionless in the black water, the thought of a death by drowning did not come to her as a simpler solution, but only as an evasion of herself, which even now she could not bring herself to perform.

It seemed then no less than inevitable that Frank Barlet's shadowy figure should be coming to her from the still deeper shadows of the garden, and that she should go towards him with a heart made lighter by the dull certainty of her end.

What was it then to her that he should draw her with him into the cottage, that he should shut the door on them both and curtain the window? That he should awaken darkness sleeping in the flame of the candle he extinguished? That he should lay his hands upon her body?

Then the broad flame of her fear closed round her heart and hid it entirely.

The next afternoon was an unusually busy one for the young lock-keeper. A continual stream of boats of all kinds and sizes passed up- and down-stream through the lock. There was a slight lull in the middle of the afternoon, but towards four o'clock a number of row boats, going down-stream appeared. The lock was full and they glided in without waiting. Closing the gates Frank Barlet went to open the sluices at the opposite end. The wheels turned and the lock began to empty. Looking round from his position on the bridge Frank's eyes passed negligently from one boat to another, then rested on one containing two people. Mr. Sorme was seated at the sculls and holding the rudder-strings was Christine, a wide hat covering all of her face but the mouth and chin.

With a distant rushing that mixed with the sound of the weir behind the cottage the water receded from the lock; the boats sank and sank, leaving the dark slimy walls building themselves into sight once more. The chains swayed against the walls, sculls clacked, voices rose and fell; but in one boat the figures were motionless and silent, sinking farther and farther. At last Frank could see nothing at all of Christine's face. She did not look up

nor move her head; and her hands clutched the rudder-strings with rigid violence.

The lock empty, Frank went to the bar and opened one side of the gates. One by one the boats moved out and laughter at temporary difficulties and awkwardness came up from the deep well of the lock and was lost in the bright air of the afternoon. Christine leaned forward slightly as her father paid the toll and took up the sculls. She seemed curiously intent upon the steering of the boat and kept her eyes fixed upon the opening into the river. Mr. Sorme took the boat-hook and jabbed at the wall with it; the boat slid swiftly forward with a swish of water in the wake and glided out through the tall black posts down-stream into the open river.

Lena Wrace

BY MAY SINCLAIR

She arranged herself there, on that divan, and I knew she'd come to tell me all about it. It was wonderful, how, at forty-seven she could still give that effect of triumph and excess, of something rich and ruinous and beautiful spread out on the brocades. The attitude showed me that her affair with Norman Hippisley was prospering; otherwise she couldn't have afforded the extravagance of it.

'I know what you want,' I said. 'You want me to congratulate you.'

'Yes. I do.'

'I congratulate you on your courage.'

'Oh, you don't like him,' she said placably.

'No, I don't like him at all.'

'He likes you,' she said. 'He thinks no end of your painting.'

'I'm not denying he's a judge of painting. I'm not even denying he can paint a little himself.'

'Better than you, Roly.'

'If you allow for the singular, obscene ugliness of his imagination, yes.'

'It's beautiful enough when he gets it into paint,' she said. 'He makes beauty. His own beauty.'

'Oh, very much his own.'

'Well, *you* just go on imitating other people's – God's or somebody's.'

She continued with her air of perfect reasonableness. 'I know he isn't good-looking. Not half so good-looking as you are. But I like him. I like his slender little body and his clever, faded face. There's a quality about him, a distinction. And look at his eyes. *Your* mind doesn't come rushing and blazing out of your eyes, my dear.'

'No. No. I'm afraid it doesn't rush. And for all the blaze –'

'Well, that's what I'm in love with, the rush, Roly, and the

blaze. And I'm in love, *for the first time*' (she underlined it) 'with a man.'

'Come,' I said, 'come.'

'Oh, *I* know. I know you're thinking of Lawson Young and Dickey Harper.'

I was.

'Well, but they don't count. I wasn't in love with Lawson. It was his career. If he hadn't been a Cabinet Minister; if he hadn't been so desperately gone on me; if he hadn't said it all depended on me –'

'Yes,' I said. 'I can see how it would go to your head.'

'It didn't. It went to my heart.' She was quite serious and solemn. 'I held him in my hands, Roly. And he held England. I couldn't let him drop, could I? I had to think of England.'

It was wonderful – Lena Wrace thinking that she thought of England.

I said, 'Of course. But for your political foresight and your virtuous action we should never have had Tariff Reform.'

'We should never have had anything,' she said. 'And look at him now. Look how he's crumpled up since he left me. It's pitiful.'

'It is. I'm afraid Mrs. Withers doesn't care about Tariff Reform.'

'Poor thing. No. Don't imagine I'm jealous of her, Roly. She hasn't got him. I mean she hasn't got what I had.'

'All the same he left you. And you weren't ecstatically happy with him the last year or two.'

'I daresay I'd have done better to have married you, if that's what you mean.'

It wasn't what I meant. But she'd always entertained the illusion that she could marry me any minute if she wanted to; and I hadn't the heart to take it from her since it seemed to console her for the way, the really very infamous way, he had left her.

So I said, 'Much better.'

'It would have been so nice, so safe,' she said. 'But I never played for safety.' Then she made one of her quick turns.

'Frances Archdale ought to marry you. Why doesn't she?'

'How should I know? Frances's reasons would be exquisite. I suppose I didn't appeal to her sense of fitness.'

'Sense of fiddlesticks. She just hasn't got any temperament, that girl.'

'Any temperament for me, you mean.'

'I mean pure cussedness,' said Lena.

'Perhaps. But, you see, if I were unfortunate enough she probably *would* marry me. If I lost my eyesight or a leg or an arm, if I couldn't sell any more pictures –'

'If you can understand Frances, you can understand me. That's how I felt about Dickey. I wasn't in love with him. I was sorry for him. I knew he'd go to pieces if I wasn't there to keep him together. Perhaps it's the maternal instinct.'

'Perhaps,' I said. Lena's reasons for her behaviour amused me; they were never exquisite, like Frances, but she was anxious that you should think they were.

'So you see,' she said, 'they don't count, and Norry really *is* the first.'

I reflected that he would be also, probably, the last. She had, no doubt, to make the most of him. But it was preposterous that she should waste so much good passion; preposterous that she should imagine for one moment she could keep the fellow. I had to warn her.

'Of course, if you care to take the risk of him –' I said. 'He won't stick to you, Lena.'

'Why shouldn't he?'

I couldn't tell her. I couldn't say, 'Because you're thirteen years older than he is.' That would have been cruel. And it would have been absurd, too, when she could so easily look not a year older than his desiccated thirty-four.

It only took a little success like this, her actual triumph in securing him.

So I said, 'Because it isn't in him. He's a bounder and a rotter.' Which was true.

'Not a bounder, Roly dear. His father's Sir Gilbert Hippisley. Hippisleys of Leicestershire.'

'A moral bounder, Lena. A slimy eel. Slips and wriggles out of

things. You'll never hold him. You're not his first affair, you know.'

'I don't care,' she said, 'as long as I'm his last.'

I could only stand and stare at that; her monstrous assumption of his fidelity. Why, he couldn't even be faithful to one art. He wrote as well as he painted, and he acted as well as he wrote, and he was never really happy with a talent till he had debauched it.

'The others,' she said, 'don't bother me a bit. He's slipped and wriggled out of their clutches, if you like. . . . Yet there was something about all of them. Distinguished. That's it. He's so awfully fine and fastidious about the women he takes up with. It flatters you, makes you feel so sure of yourself. You know he wouldn't take up with *you* if you weren't fine and fastidious, too – one of his great ladies. . . . You think I'm a snob, Roly?'

'I think you don't mind coming *after* Lady Willersey.'

'Well,' she said, 'if you *have* to come after somebody –'

'True.' I asked her if she was giving me her reasons.

'Yes, if you want them. *I* don't. I'm content to love out of all reason.'

And she did. She loved extravagantly, unintelligibly, out of all reason; yet irrefutably. To the end. There's a sort of reason in that, isn't there? She had the sad logic of her passions.

She got up and gathered herself together in her sombre, violent beauty and in its glittering sheath, her red fox skins, all her savage splendour, leaving a scent of crushed orris root in the warmth of her lair.

Well, she managed to hold him, tight, for a year, fairly intact. I can't for the life of me imagine how she could have cared for the fellow, with his face all dried and frayed with make-up. There was something lithe and sinuous about him that may, of course, have appealed to her. And I can understand his infatuation. He was decadent, exhausted; and there would be moments when he found her primitive violence stimulating, before it wore him out.

They kept up the *ménage* for two astounding years.

Well, not so very astounding, if you come to think of it. There was Lena's money, left her by old Weinberger, her maternal uncle. You've got to reckon with Lena's money. Not that she, poor soul,

ever reckoned with it; she was absolutely free from that taint, and she couldn't conceive other people reckoning. Only, instinctively, she knew. She knew how to hold Hippisley. She knew there were things he couldn't resist, things like wines and motor cars he could be faithful to. From the very beginning she built for permanence, for eternity. She took a house in Avenue Road with a studio for Hippisley in the garden; she bought a motor car and engaged an inestimable cook. Lena's dinners, in those years, were exquisite affairs, and she took care to ask the right people, people who would be useful to Hippisley, dealers whom old Weinberger had known, and journalists and editors and publishers. And all his friends and her own; even friends' friends. Her hospitality was boundless and eccentric, and Hippisley liked that sort of thing. He thrived in a liberal air, an air of gorgeous spending, though he sported a supercilious smile at the *fioritura*, the luscious excess of it. He had never had too much, poor devil, of his own. I've seen the little fellow swaggering about at her parties, with his sharp, frayed face, looking fine and fastidious, safeguarding himself with twinklings and gestures that gave the dear woman away. I've seen him, in goggles and a magnificent fur-lined coat, shouting to her chauffeur, giving counter-orders to her own, while she sat snuggling up in the corner of the car, smiling at his mastery.

It went on till poor Lena was forty-nine. Then, as she said, she began to 'shake in her shoes.' I told her it didn't matter so long as she didn't let him see her shaking. That depressed her, because she knew she couldn't hide it; there was nothing secret in her nature; she had always let 'them' see. And they were bothering her – 'the others' – more than 'a bit.' She was jealous of every one of them, of any woman he said more than five words to. Jealous of the models, first of all, before she found out that they didn't matter; he was so used to them. She would stick there, in his studio, while they sat, until one day he got furious and turned her out of it. But she'd seen enough to set her mind at rest. He was fine and fastidious, and the models were all 'common.'

'And their figures, Roly, you should have seen them when they

were undressed. Of course, you *have* seen them. Well, there isn't – is there?'

And there wasn't. Hippisley had grown out of models just as he had grown out of cheap Burgundy. And he'd left the stage, because he was tired of it, so there was, mercifully, no danger from that quarter. What she dreaded was the moment when he'd 'take' to writing again, for then he'd have to have a secretary. Also she was jealous of his writing because it absorbed more of his attention than his painting, and exhausted him more, left her less of him.

And that year, their third year, he flung up his painting and was, as she expressed it, 'at it' again. Worse than ever. And he wanted a secretary.

She took care to find him one. One who wouldn't be dangerous. 'You should just see her, Roly.' She brought her in to tea one day for me to look at and say whether she would 'do.'

I wasn't sure – what can you be sure of? – but I could see why Lena thought she would. She was a little unhealthy thing, dark and sallow and sulky, with thin lips that showed a lack of temperament, and she had a stiffness and preciseness like a Board School teacher – just that touch of 'commonness' which Lena relied on to put him off. She wore a shabby brown skirt and a yellowish blouse. Her name was Ethel Reeves.

Lena had secured safety, she said, in the house. But what was the good of that, when outside it he was going about everywhere with Sybil Fermor? She came and told me all about it, with a sort of hope that I'd say something either consoling or revealing, something that she could go on.

'*You* know him, Roly,' she said.

I reminded her that she hadn't always given me that credit.

'*I* know how he spends his time,' she said.

'How do you know?'

'Well, for one thing, Ethel tells me.'

'How does she know?'

'She – she posts the letters.'

'Does she read them?'

'She needn't. He's too transparent.'

'Lena, do you use her to spy on him?' I said.

'Well,' she retorted, 'if he uses her –'

I asked her if it hadn't struck her that Sybil Fermor might be using him?

'Do you mean – as a *paravent*? Or,' she revised it, 'a parachute?'

'For Bertie Granville,' I elucidated. 'A parachute, by all means.'

She considered it. 'It won't work,' she said. 'If it's her reputation she's thinking of, wouldn't Norry be worse?'

I said that was the beauty of him, if Letty Granville's attention was to be diverted.

'Oh, Roly,' she said, 'do you really think it's that?'

I said I did, and she powdered her nose and said I was a dear and I'd bucked her up no end, and went away quite happy.

Letty Granville's divorce suit proved to her that I was right.

The next time I saw her she told me she'd been mistaken about Sybil Fermor. It was Lady Hermione Nevin. Norry had been using Sybil as a '*paravent*' for *her*. I said she was wrong again. Didn't she know that Hermione was engaged to Billy Craven? They were head over ears in love with each other. I asked her what on earth had made her think of her? And she said Lady Hermione had paid him thirty guineas for a picture. That looked, she said, as if she was pretty far gone on him. (She tended to disparage Hippisley's talents. Jealousy again.)

I said it looked as if he had the iciest reasons for cultivating Lady Hermione. And again she told me I was a dear. 'You don't know, Roly, what a comfort you are to me.'

Then Barbara Vining turned up out of nowhere, and from the first minute Lena gave herself up for lost.

'I'm done for,' she said. 'I'd fight her if it was any good fighting. But what chance have I? At forty-nine against nineteen, and that face?'

The face was adorable if you adore a child's face on a woman's body. Small and pink; a soft, innocent forehead; fawn skin hair, a fawn's nose, a fawn's mouth, a fawn's eyes. You saw her at Lena's garden parties, staring at Hippisley over the rim of her plate while she browsed on Lena's cakes and ices, or bounding

about Lena's tennis court with the sash ribbons flying from her little butt end.

Oh, yes; she had her there. As much as he wanted. And there would be Ethel Reeves, in a new blouse, looking on from a back seat, subtle and sullen, or handing round cups and plates without speaking to anybody, like a servant. I used to think she spied on them for Lena. They were always mouching about the garden together or sitting secretly in corners; Lena even had her to stay with them, let him take her for long drives in the car. She knew when she was beaten.

I said, 'Why do you let him do it, Lena? Why don't you turn them both neck and crop out of the house?'

'Because I want him in it. I want him at any cost. And I want him to have what he wants, too, even if it's Barbara. I want him to be happy. . . . I'm making a virtue of necessity. It can be done, Roly, if you give up beautifully.'

I put it to her it wasn't giving up beautifully to fret herself into an unbecoming illness, to carry her disaster on her face. She would come to me looking more ruined than ruinous, haggard and ashy, her eyes all shrunk and hot with crying, and stand before the glass, looking at herself and dabbing on powder in an utter abandonment to misery.

'I know,' she moaned. 'As if losing him wasn't enough I must go and lose my looks. I know crying's simply suicidal at my age, yet I keep on at it. I'm doing for myself. I'm digging my own grave, Roly. A little deeper every day.'

Then she said suddenly, 'Do you know, you're the only man in London I could come to looking like this.'

I said, 'Isn't that a bit unkind of you? It sounds as though you thought I didn't matter.'

She broke down at that. 'Can't you see it's because I know *I* don't any more? Nobody cares whether my nose is red or not. But you're not a brute. You don't let me feel I don't matter. I know I never did matter to you, Roly, but the effect's soothing, all the same. . . . Ethel says if she were me she wouldn't stand it. To have it going on under my nose. Ethel is so high-minded. I suppose it's easy to be high-minded if you've always looked like

that. And if you've never *had* anybody. She doesn't know what it is. I tell you, I'd rather have Norry there with Barbara then not have him at all.'

I thought and said that would just about suit Hippisley's book. He'd rather be there than anywhere else, since he had to be somewhere. To be sure she irritated him with her perpetual clinging, and wore him out. I've seen him wince at the sound of her voice in the room. He'd say things to her; not often, but just enough to see how far he could go. He was afraid of going too far. He wasn't prepared to give up the comfort of Lena's house, the opulence and peace. There wasn't one of Lena's wines he could have turned his back on. After all, when she worried him he could keep himself locked up in the studio away from her.

There was Ethel Reeves; but Lena didn't worry about his being locked up with *her*. She was very kind to Hippisley's secretary. Since she wasn't dangerous, she liked to see her there, well housed, eating rich food, and getting stronger and stronger every day.

I must say my heart bled for Lena when I thought of young Barbara. It was still bleeding when one afternoon she walked in with her old triumphant look; she wore her hat with an *air crâne*, and the powder on her face was even and intact, like the first pure fall of snow. She looked ten years younger, and I judged that Hippisley's affair with Barbara was at an end.

Well – it had never had a beginning; nor the ghost of a beginning. It had never happened at all. She had come to tell me that: that there was nothing in it; nothing but her jealousy; the miserable, damnable jealousy that made her think things. She said it would be a lesson to her to trust him in the future not to go falling in love. For, she argued, if he hadn't done it this time with Barbara, he'd never do it.

I asked her how she knew he hadn't, this time, when appearances all pointed that way? And she said that Barbara had come and told her. Somebody, it seemed, had been telling Barbara it was known that she'd taken Hippisley from Lena, and that Lena was crying herself into a nervous breakdown. And the child had gone straight to Lena and told her it was a beastly lie. She hadn't taken

Hippisley. She liked ragging with him and all that, and being seen about with him at parties, because he was a celebrity and it made the other woman, the women he wouldn't talk to, furious. But as for taking him, why, she wouldn't take him from anybody as a gift. She didn't want him, a scrubby old thing like that. She didn't *like* that dragged look about his mouth and the way the skin wrinkled on his eyelids. There was a sincerity about Barbara that would have blasted Hippisley if he'd known.

Besides, she wouldn't have hurt Lena for the world. She wouldn't have spoken to Norry if she'd dreamed that Lena minded. But Lena had seemed so remarkably not to mind. When she came to that part of it she cried.

Lena said that was all very well, and it didn't matter whether Barbara was in love with Norry or not; but how did she know Norry wasn't in love with *her*? And Barbara replied amazingly that of course she knew. They'd been alone together.

When I remarked that it was precisely *that*, Lena said, No. That was nothing in itself; but it would prove one way or another; and it seemed that when Norry found himself alone with Barbara, he used to yawn.

After that Lena settled down to a period of felicity. She'd come to me, excited and exulting, bringing her poor little happiness with her like a new toy. She'd sit there looking at it, turning it over and over, and holding it up to me to show how beautiful it was.

She pointed out to me that I had been wrong and she right about him, from the beginning. She knew him.

'And to think what a fool, what a damned silly fool I was, with my jealousy. When all those years there was never anybody but me. Do you remember Sybil Fermor, and Lady Hermione – and Barbara? To think I should have so clean forgotten what he was like. . . . Don't you think, Roly, there must be something in me, after all, to have kept him all those years?'

I said there must indeed have been, to have inspired so remarkable a passion. For Hippisley was making love to her all over again. Their happy relations were proclaimed, not only by her own engaging frankness, but still more by the marvellous renais-

sance of her beauty. She had given up her habit of jealousy as she had given up eating sweets, because both were murderous to her complexion. Not that Hippisley gave her any cause. He had ceased to cultivate the society of young and pretty ladies, and devoted himself with almost ostentatious fidelity to Lena. Their affair had become irreproachable with time; it had the permanence of a successful marriage without the unflattering element of legal obligation. And he had kept his secretary. Lena had left off being afraid either that Ethel would leave or that Hippisley would put some dangerous woman in her place.

There was no change in Ethel, except that she looked rather more subtle and less sullen. Lena ignored her subtlety as she had ignored her sulks. She had no more use for her as a confidant and spy, and Ethel lived in a back den off Hippisley's study with her Remington, and displayed a convenient apathy in allowing herself to be ignored.

'Really,' Lena would say in the unusual moments when she thought of her, 'if it wasn't for the clicking, you wouldn't know she was there.'

And as a secretary she maintained, up to the last, an admirable efficiency.

Up to the last.

It was Hippisley's death that ended it. You know how it happened – suddenly, of heart failure, in Paris. He'd gone there with Furnival to get material for that book they were doing together. Lena was literally 'prostrated' with the shock; and Ethel Reeves had to go over to Paris to bring back his papers and his body.

It was the day after the funeral that it all came out. Lena and Ethel were sitting up together over the papers and the letters, turning out his bureau. I suppose that, in the grand immunity his death conferred on her, poor Lena had become provokingly possessive. I can hear her saying to Ethel that there had never been anybody but her, all those years. Praising his faithfulness; holding out her dead happiness, and apologizing to Ethel for talking about it when Ethel didn't understand, never having had any.

She must have said something like that, to bring it on herself, just then, of all moments.

And I can see Ethel Reeves, sitting at his table, stolidly sorting out his papers, wishing that Lena'd go away and leave her to her work. And her sullen eyes firing out questions, asking her what she wanted, what she had to do with Norman Hippisley's papers, what she was there for, fussing about, when it was all over?

What she wanted – what she had come for – was her letters. They were locked up in his bureau in the secret drawer.

She told me what had happened then. Ethel lifted her sullen, subtle eyes and said, 'You think he kept them?'

She said she knew he'd kept them. They were in that drawer.

And Ethel said, 'Well then, he didn't. They aren't. He burnt them. *We* burnt them. . . . We could, at least, get rid of *them*!'

Then she threw it at her. She had been Hippisley's mistress for three years.

When Lena asked for proofs of the incredible assertion she had *her* letters to show.

Oh, it was her moment. She must have been looking out for it, saving up for it, all those years; gloating over her exquisite secret, her return for all the slighting and ignoring. That was what had made her poisonous, the fact that Lena hadn't reckoned with her, hadn't thought her dangerous, hadn't been afraid to leave Hippisley with her, the rich, arrogant contempt in her assumption that Ethel would 'do' and her comfortable confidences. It made her amorous and malignant. It stimulated her to the attempt.

I think she must have hated Lena more vehemently than she loved Hippisley. She couldn't, *then*, have had much reliance on her power to capture; but her hatred was a perpetual suggestion. Supposing – supposing she were to try and take him?

Then she had tried.

I daresay she hadn't much difficulty. Hippisley wasn't quite so fine and fastidious as Lena thought him. I've no doubt he liked Ethel's unwholesomeness, just as he had liked the touch of morbidity in Lena.

And the spying? That had been all part of the game; his and

Ethel's. *They* played for safety, if you like. They had *had* to throw Lena off the scent. They used Sybil Fermor and Lady Hermione and Barbara Vining, one after the other, as their *paravents*. Finally they had used Lena. That was their cleverest stroke. It brought them a permanent security. For, you see, Hippisley wasn't going to give up his free quarters, his studio, the dinners and the motor car, if he could help it. Not for Ethel. And Ethel knew it. They insured her, too.

Can't you see her, letting herself go in an ecstasy of revenge, winding up with a hysterical youp? 'You? You thought it was you? It was me – *me* – ME. . . . You thought what we meant you to think.'

Lena still comes and talks to me. To hear her you would suppose that Lawson Young and Dickey Harper never existed, that her passion for Norman Hippisley was the unique, solitary manifestation of her soul. It certainly burnt with the intensest flame. It certainly consumed her. What's left of her's all shrivelled, warped, as she writhed in her fire.

Yesterday she said to me, 'Roly, I'm *glad* he's dead. Safe from her clutches.'

She'll cling for a little while to this last illusion: that he had been reluctant; but I doubt if she really believes it now.

For you see, Ethel flourishes. In passion, you know, nothing succeeds like success; and her affair with Norman Hippisley advertised her, so that very soon it ranked as the first of a series of successes. She goes about dressed in stained-glass futurist muslins, and contrives provocative effects out of a tilted nose, and sulky eyes, and sallowness set off by a black velvet band on the forehead, and a black scarf of hair dragged tight from a raking backward peak.

I saw her the other night sketching a frivolous gesture –

Storm[1]

BY L. A. G. STRONG

SCOWLING blackly, muttering to himself, he strode along the rough lane which led to the open moor. As soon as he could he left it, taking the shortest way up a steep slope dotted with squat furze bushes. He climbed powerfully, forcing his way upwards with savage thrusts of his thighs, plunging his feet down into the soft turf with all the strength of rage that was in him; bending forward to get the fullest measure of his power, heedless of the sultry sky and the sweat leaping out on him at every step.

In a couple of minutes he had reached the top, and, relieved from the pressure of the slope, swung along like a cloud. A little breeze sprang up and touched his forehead, and even in his black mood he half consciously acknowledged its caress. Yet there was that in him which was intolerant of ease or relief, and made him press on fiercely with great tearing strides. The main road lay two hundred yards ahead. His legs ate up the distance as though by very will-power he could reach out and clutch it towards him; soon his hobnailed boots rang out in three sudden steps upon the road, and with a run and jump were hushed upon the turf beyond.

Two old men were mending the road a little farther down. The voice of one came up clearly on the oppressed air.

'Stoorm be comin' up, I reckon, Joe,' it quavered. Deeper, less clear, another answered it:

'Aye . . . bit thundersome, like . . .'

But the walker scarcely heeded them, or the coming storm they spoke of. Though the sun was shining sickly and uneasily, as if it had done something it was ashamed of, and though sullen clouds, with edges delicate as the fronds of maidenhair, were gathering over the valley from opposite quarters of the sky, and the birds twittered forlornly or with shrill alarm, he strode on in his shirt-sleeves deeper and deeper into the moor.

Why should one yearn all earth and heaven towards a woman

[1] From *Doyle's Rock, and Other Stories*, by L. A. G. Strong, by permission of Basil Blackwell.

when she was near-by, and lose her clean out of mind when she was away? Why the hell? Nay, still more, why should a woman be different in the very soul of her, when she was gone, from when she was to hand? That was the biggest question of all. When she was to hand, placid, yes, easy, yes, ready to please, yes, never a one to assert herself – she was all that: damn it, she didn't complain of anything, she seemed happy enough, you wouldn't think she had a complaint in her. Yet, no sooner would he be gone, and the urgency of her out of his mind for the time – and that was a good job, for no man could live long at that pitch – than there would come a letter, full of God-knows-how-many whinings and complaints. Why had he said this and that (which he never remembered saying); why had he done this and the other (which he never minded doing); and why had he left this undone, or put such-and-such a slight upon her, and critickized her shortcomings, (when no such things had been in his mind at all). When a man was with her, she was all smiles and yielding. Once he was gone, there wasn't a thing of all the things he had done or not done that she couldn't turn into a reproach against him.

Not a good angry complaint, mind ye – he stumbled over a stone and swore – but a little whining soft complaint. I know I'm not good enough for you, and I'm willing to be the dirt beneath your feet, but you needn't be mocking at me and turning my humble love to scorn. The hell!

Bile rose in his throat, bitter under the tongue, and he ground his teeth and swallowed grimly. Too damned placid, that's what she was. Why couldn't she have a respect for herself, and stand up to a man? But she couldn't, not in flesh nor on paper. Only nag, nag, nag, complain, complain, complain, and she hadn't even the courage to do that to a chap's face. No: nothing to his face. Once, when his feelings had been too strong for him, and he had gone a bit far – torn her bodice a bit – she had placidly pinned it up and sat looking at him with that silly smile of hers. Damn it, if she'd up and spoke her mind, fetched him one over the mouth, perhaps – why, then a man could shout, a man could laugh, take the adorable little vixen in his arms and crush and kiss her into submission. A clean fight, if fight must be, and a fiery passion to

match his own – that was the woman for him. He wanted a telling off, now and then: he'd take managing from a woman that knew her mind and spoke it; but what use was violence and passion against a mere unresisting sheep of a woman who never struggled nor put up fight at all? No, nothing at the time, but all of it weakly afterwards in a letter. 'I suppose it is only natural you can't respect me and treat me respectful as a girl should be treated, I'm so much below you. Give in to you too much, I have, and that is my reward, that you treat me like a low woman off the streets.' What did she know about women off the streets? It would serve her right if –. Words and talk, that was all, names and words and talk.

Just such another letter in his hand now. He straightened out the crumpled paper as he walked. The sweat from his palm had blurred some of the ink. No matter – a chap didn't want to read all that wit-pot again. All of it the same; complaining of this, that, and the other; but she'd done it once too often this time. By God, she had. Other times, he hadn't seen her within a day or so of a letter, and, when they'd met, his anger had cooled and her attraction for him had killed what was left of it. The moment he saw her it all melted, giving place to another fire her nearness never failed to kindle. And he resented this fire, hated and fought against his passion for her, since he did not need his mother to tell him, again and again, that Daisy was not suited to him, and that there could be no peace in such a love. Yet Daisy loved him, and – when his arms were round her – he loved Daisy. Each time he saw her his doubts were stilled, only to quicken like a litter of snakes, once the turn of the lane had hidden her from his sight.

But not this time. This time was different. This was to be the last of all. Her letter had come, when by a good chance there was nothing to do at the shed till a load of timber should come in after midday; and he had started off at once in the first heat of his anger to see her and be done with it. Thus he plunged along, the sweat running down his loins, under a sky that matched his mood. Nay, everything around him seemed to confirm his anger. Even as he tore along he found time for a little surprise at himself, admiration

for the persistence of his own wrath, which was generally a quick fire, blazing up and soon dead, like a gorse bush in March. But now the arid, lowering sky seemed to beat his own flames back upon himself; flame engendering flame.

A car stuttered along the road, which was now a good two miles behind him. It hooted sharply, perhaps at a pony straying in its path, and he heard with surprising clearness the noise it made changing gears on Merivale Hill. Roused slightly to his surroundings, he looked around. The sun was almost hidden: the sky was pale and leathery, and the black clouds towered above the valley. Well – let it rain. So much the better.

Over the next rise, and he would be in sight of the house. Not long now. Grimly he set his thighs to this last effort, and grimly they answered. One minute now. His head swung over the skyline. There – there she was – the fool – of all things – hanging out clothes to dry. With a thunder-storm just coming on. The crack-brained fool.

When would she see him? He raced noiselessly over the space between, to get as near as might be to her before she saw. Hanging out washing to-day; my God, what a fool!

She was hidden behind a sheet. There was difficulty with it: it wouldn't stay up. Placidly she contended with it, and conquered it.

Near the gate now. Damn it, too late. She had looked up and seen him.

For an instant she stared, unable to believe her eyes: then she ran joyfully to meet him.

'Dave!' she cried. 'My Davey! What brings 'ee here this time o' day? Come in, come in! I be that glad to see 'ee.'

For a moment, at the sight of her, he felt himself grow weak, his loins relax, everything fade but the old craving to take her in his arms. Then he felt this very urge blacken and curdle and go sour within him: the innocence of her welcome, as though she had written no letter to him, her obtuseness to what had so sorely angered him, brought back his sullen fury tenfold. He stood scowling on her.

'This here is what brings me.'

He held out the crumpled letter: but, in the shock of her first surprise, she did not notice, talking on happily to him, waiting for no answers to her questions.

'Come in, come in, sit down, and take a glass of cider to cool 'ee after such a long walk in this heat. Come in, come in –'

'This here is what brings me!' He cut her short, speaking the words harshly and loudly, holding out the letter in her face.

She looked at it, not yet aware of his anger.

'Oh aye, my letter, but never mind that now, 'tis so nice to have 'ee here, so unexpected and all.'

Was the maid mad? Had she no sort of sense?

'I repeat, this here is what brings me.' He swallowed hard, and glared at her, with an awkward tightness at the corners of his jaw. 'In this here letter you lay several complaints to me about my conduc'. You charge this against me, and that against me, saying I've served you inconsiderate and failed in respect to you, and such-like.'

He stopped, and swallowed again, while she stared in surprise at him.

'Every time after I've been with you, or 'most every time,' he continued, his voice now deliberate and controlled, 'you write me a letter of this sort, charging such manner of conduc' to me. I've bore enough of it. I'm not a-going to stand it no more.'

Comprehension came at last to her. She leaned her fair head back a little, a gesture that was invariable with her if any creature was to be soothed, from a frightened chicken to a human. The gesture he had loved insulted his anger now.

'Oh, that letter. Davey dear, don't mind none of it, don't pay no heed to it. It don't signify a bit! Come in; do 'ee have a glass of cider and –'

'If it don't signify, where in hell's the sense of writing it?'

'Davey dear, never mind. Come in and –'

'And, if it don't signify, where's the sense of writing it every bloody time?'

Her eyes stared a little at the oath, but she made no comment.

'Davey dear –'

'Saving that up for the next letter, I suppose? "You use bad

language to me as if I was a common woman off the streets,"' he mimicked, in exaggerated falsetto. 'Wouldn't say it to my face, would you? Oh no, keep it to put 'pon paper. Bah!' He spat on the grass.

Tears gathered in her big grey eyes.

'Davey dear, I was wicked to write they letters, I shouldn't ha' said it. But you don't know what it feels like, alone here, with only father. I haven't a mother to help me and advise me. I only – it's only after you've gone – that – that I remember what she told me –'

She was crying now.

'What she told you? When? What did she tell you?'

'B – before she died.'

There was a pause. He must not be cheated of his just anger. Crying. Damn woman. A hundred ways they had to sap a man's strength.

'Well, you can just make up your mind once and for all, your mother or me. Either you stop writing me letters like this, or I see you no more again, never. Either you stop – but, damn it, you won't stop,' he shouted suddenly. 'You won't stop, you can't stop, it isn't in you, you cruel she-devil, you. You'll fault me, and dig at me, and reprove me, and lay it all on your dead mother in her grave. And it's you, it's you, it's you,' he repeated, conscious of his own injustice, and the more furious because of it; 'all the time it's you, and none other!'

A few big drops of rain fell, and even in the midst of her agitation he saw her glance anxiously round at the clothes on the line. Bloody Martha! He stepped close to her, and she looked round to find his red sweaty face a few inches from her own.

'Davey dear.' She stretched up her arms, to put them round his neck.

'*Davey, dear!*' He tore her hands away. 'Aye. Damn fine. Davey dear when I'm by, and devil ill-treating of a poor motherless maid when I'm away, eh? One of these days I will ill-treat you – I –'

His fingers were biting into her plump smooth shoulders, and suddenly, in a realization that shocked him, he felt for the first

time how passionate love can turn to lust for sheer cruelty. He felt half pleased, half horrified.

Daisy straightened herself up, and looked into his face with a dignity he had never seen in her before.

'Very well,' she said quietly and simply. 'Hurt me then, if you want to. Hurt me.'

He grinned down at her stiffly with a dry mouth.

'Clever enough. Clever enough. You know how to put a man in the wrong, don't you?'

With a gesture so sudden that it surprised him, he let her go, and stood clear from her. Then he turned on his heel and strode away.

That's all; all over. He hadn't hurt her. She couldn't say that. Walk away and leave her. That's the best way.

Oh yes. Run after me. He strode his fastest. That's good for her. That'll make her fine bosom shake.

She was close behind him now. Well, she'd had a run for her money. He dodged once or twice, till the childish indignity of it struck even him, and he stopped and faced her.

'Well,' he said, 'and what now?'

'Davey dear,' she panted. 'Don't go off from me like that – I can't bear it. Hurt me – serve me out – only don't go off and leave me. Hurt me – I want you to.'

She clung to him panting. Her blouse had come open a little in front, he could see her breast heaving, close against him. Her breath came on his face in warm sweet gusts. All his body reeled towards surrender. One moment more, and he was gone.

He seized her shoulders and held her away from him. In her breathlessness her head fell back, showing her parted lips and nostrils. He shut his eyes.

'No – you – don't,' he said slowly.

She was really frightened now, she was clinging to his arms.

'No – you – don't.'

'Davey – hurt me, beat me, anything, but open your eyes. Davey – you look awful. Open your eyes. Davey – Davey! Davey!' She screamed, tearing free a hand, and beating frantically at his face.

He smiled grimly, setting his face as against a hailstorm. What happened when one put forth one's full strength against a woman? Would she break? Would she hit her head on a stone and be killed? Well, she had a sporting chance; his eyes were shut.

Shifting his feet warily till he felt a good grip, he poised the distraught girl, took breath, and with the full deliberate might of all his body flung her from him. He heard the soft thud of her collapse and the little hiccuping cry it jerked from her. She hadn't hit a stone; good for her.

Then he turned his back on the sound, opened his eyes, and began to run. To run; just quickly at first, then furiously down the rough slope of the moor. That was the way – shut your eyes. Then they couldn't get you. Who was the chap he'd heard of at school who stopped up his ears? Never mind: better to stop your eyes. Davey dear! No, stop both, best of all.

He ran wildly, leaping over stones and bushes, shouting to startled ponies, laughing with what breath was in him.

'Davey dear. Da-avey dear!' he called as he flew down a steep place in great reckless strides. He'd break his leg if he put a foot down false. Never mind. Never – An enormous raindrop hit him in the eye so suddenly that he paused disconcerted, rubbed it clear, and looked up at the sky. For a moment he was sobered, for its aspect was appalling.

On a background that in some places was the colour of a wet lead roof, and in others a livid orange, great masses of cloud, blue, dove-grey, and black, moved restlessly. Over the valley a veritable tower of cloud continued to pile itself up into a solid mass. Smaller fragments from time to time clung to its edges, or broke swiftly from it. On his right a mass of violet and deep angry blue was tossing and shaking its edges as a petulant woman her skirts: then, in a minute, it was as though she gathered them apprehensively around her legs. A cloud across the valley, which had been moving uneasily about as if uncertain where to go, stopped as he watched it, seemed to hover, and suddenly swooped earthwards, blotting out all beneath it in the dark feathery smudge of its disintegration. A cold breeze came up towards him from the valley, as if all the air there was trying to get away before that

huge, imminent bulk of cloud came down; and the whole earth seemed to be crouching, eyes half shut with terror, in anticipation of the terrific flash that should let loose the storm.

Then Dave laughed once more, breaking the spell which held him, and plunged onwards. Let it come down, a wild weather suited to his mood.

'I'll race ye,' he yelled to the lowering sky. 'I'll be below in shelter before ye come down, see if I don't.'

And he ran on even faster.

The road was below him, a staring ribbon. No sign of the two old men. They were well under cover, he thought, by now; and he spared time to chuckle, thinking of the consternation with which, from a chink in their retreat, they must be viewing so portentous a sky. Damn the day; sweating did you no good a day like this. The hot air pressed upon a man; the sky was a pot of brass, rammed down on his temples. Aha, the road. Hullo, his legs were going a bit. Well, small wonder, you run nearly three miles, old boyo, and you out of training and all; what would old Harry Greenwood say, good old Harry – damn rough going here, go easy – damn – go easy – damn – easy, man, easy! Blast it all, you was nearly over then.

He was breathing painfully in great gasps, and the sweat was running into his eyes and blinding him. Ease up on the slope, can't see where you're going; damn it all, break your bloody leg in a minute.

He had found the track now, and was stumbling along it, panting and talking to himself incoherently. He knew he was because he could hear himself. Done up a bit, old boyo; all right after a rest.

Dark. He lifted his streaming face and looked up at the sky. Black – good God – black as ink; like a nigger's face looking down.

Then, as he looked, the sky grinned suddenly and evilly at him. He put his hand up to his eyes, and staggered. With a rattle as of all the steeples in heaven cracking and crashing down, the storm broke, and with it, in a glaring hissing flood, the rain. Half blinded by the lightning, and deafened by the thunder, Dave cowered before the rain in sheer incredulous horror. It hit him in

the face like water slapped on him by derisive devils from a bucket. There wasn't, there couldn't be such rain. It was a river he'd fallen in, a river. Holy God, he'd be drowned. Keep your head down, you'll be drowned else.

Rain. A white, gleaming, roaring wall of rain, blotting out the land. Even the incessant lightning was only a dazzle on the rain, like light shimmering through the slats of a Venetian blind, and above the steady roar of the rain the thunder could scarcely be distinguished.

Then, abruptly, it lifted, dwindled to nothing; and David, with the roar of it in the woods below him, found himself crawling laboriously on hands and knees towards the shelter of a little group of bushes in an air the colour of pea-soup.

Better now. Cautiously he raised himself, and at last stood, barely able to support the weight of his dripping clothes. Better; it had eased off a bit. Not all over yet, though, not by a long chalk. You could almost write with chalk on that sky, it was black enough. Of course, the lightning did that, didn't it? Of course. That was the chalk. Funny thought, that. Never had a thought like that before.

The darkness thickened, and suddenly everything was hideous blazing light; and David had time to see a tree, just in front of him, every branch agleam like pale silver, topple slowly over and subside. Then he fell into blackness.

Hundreds of catherine wheels of many colours were being sprayed up from a fountain in long curves. They made a whirring noise, mm-m, mm-m. They were pulling the blood in a chap's head; yes, they were most certainly pulling the blood in a chap's head, all up to a point. Unbearable tight pain, hard luck on a chap, soon it will burst. Gup – phisss – ss – ss! It's burst, those are its drops spattering his face. No, it's cold, and blood drops would be hot, wouldn't they, yes of course. It's rain, cold rain. The storm isn't over then, no, but it's better, it isn't so heavy, that rain isn't, because he is face uppermost and if it was like it was before he'd be drowned – perhaps you are anyway, Dave.

Lord have mercy upon us, Christ have mercy upon us, Lord have –

Where was he? For a moment he couldn't get up; then he battled through some dripping foliage, and stood up unhurt. The sky was clear, the rain was gone; under the sun the drenched landscape winked and glittered, and a thousand birds carolled wild thanksgiving for their deliverance from the storm.

Weak, but wonderfully clear in mind and spirit, he staggered out on the track, his strength coming back with every step he took. A lark shot madly up in front of him, filling the sky with a delirium of praise. Then sudden remembrance came to him, and he stopped in horror. Daisy!

All his bile and bitterness of rage had gone with the storm: sane and clean, he was appalled to recollect what had been happening before it. Daisy – what had happened to her, lying maybe senseless in the storm, waking perhaps in terror, rising to run, struck – He winced, and fell on his knees in the road.

O God, Who has spared Thine unworthy servant – no, he was no servant of God, he who browbeat women and flung them on the ground, a strong brute – but spare her, O God, let her not be killed, O God I love her, and maybe I've killed her.

He blundered to his feet and began in a jog-trot to make for the moor once more, whipped on by keen agony. What had come over him to behave so. He had been mad, possessed by a devil, as the saying is. Poor girl, he saw it all. It was her very goodness he had struck at. When she was with him, she loved him so that she could refuse him nothing. When he had gone, she would remember the words of her dead mother; words to which, he now saw, in her ignorance of the world she could not give their true value, bless her poor little heart. And thus loyalty to that dead counsellor, and honest desire to break no jot of a code she had been too young to understand, had made her write those letters full of fear and anxious doubt. He pictured to himself, as he laboured on, what those last injunctions must have been; pictured the little girl by the bedside, with grey, wide-open eyes, trying to take them all in and remember them. 'Yes, mother dear. No, mother dear.' Poor little Daisy; he groaned to think of his own blindness. Never mind; he would make it all up to her, if – oh God – if she were not dead, drowned, struck, if he had not killed

her. But if she lived – kind God, good God, let her be alive, don't punish her for my sin – why then, he planned innumerable tendernesses for her, making his way over the moor towards her home.

Daisy, once more hanging out her washing about an hour after the finish of the storm, looked up to see Dave stagger towards the gate. With quick solicitude she ran forward and caught him by the arm just as he was about to fall.

'Why, Davey dear,' she cried, 'you're all wet! Were you catched in the storm? Come in, my dear, and I'll get 'ee some dry clothes.'

David raised a haggard face, looked at her, and fell on his knees.

'Thank God,' he whispered, 'you're safe, you're safe.'

She blinked at him.

'I didn't hurt you? You weren't out in the storm?'

'Out in the storm? No – dear – no! What's more, I got the washing in in time, before the rain came.'

'I didn't hurt you, that – that time I threw you down?'

'No, Davey dear.' She became grave, as she helped him up the path. 'Davey, I'm sorry I vexed you so. I must have vexed you dreadful, unmeaning. I won't do it no more.'

She piloted him into the kitchen, and sat him down before the fire. 'Sit there, till I get you some dry clothes. Then I'll go away while you changes.'

'Daisy,' he said meekly, as she went to the stairs, 'Daisy, I was out in all the rain. I was nearly drownded . . . I saw a tree struck with lightning close in front of me, Daisy.'

She looked back at him over her shoulder.

'Yes,' she said, 'dreadful rain, wasn't it?'

Left alone, he felt weak, and stared dully into the fire. The storm had swept him clear of anger and indeed of all emotion; he had little thought but the need to make her understand his remorse. Why wouldn't she understand at once? He was too tired to explain. Well, she was safe, anyway, thank God. Yes, thank God for that. He wasn't a murderer, anyway.

He heard her cross the room above, and saw her coming down

the stair: first her feet and legs, then a bundle of clothes, and last of all her face, rosy from stooping, smiled at him.

'Here be the clothes, Davey dear. They be father's. He'll have took shelter down to Merivale, I'll be bound. He's a good one to look after himself, better than my Davey.'

He caught her arm, and spoke to her almost in despair.

'Daisy, hearken to me. I was out in the storm – you don't know what it was like: I was knocked down, Daisy, almost drownded, and a tree struck flat beside me.'

'Poor darling, then. Hurry up now and change out of they wet clothes.'

'– and . . . listen, Daisy . . . when I realized . . . I realized that God had spared me, an awful fear came over me that you were lying out in it all, dead, that perhaps I'd killed you, Daisy . . .'

It was no use. She was only half-listening. Her eye was roving round the room, towards the big oak dresser.

'Stupid!' she said, turning to him with a smile. 'I was in long before the rain came. I came straight back and took in the washing. Now hurry up, there's a dear, do, and when you're ready I'll give 'ee a glass of cordial, so as you won't take cold.'

And with a last injunction to hurry, she was gone.

Well. . . . She wouldn't understand, ever. So far as she was concerned, his agony had been for nothing. Yet he had served her bad, there was no gainsaying that. He must treat her more loving, more understanding, in future. Perhaps no woman had more imagination that that; perhaps they were all as ready to take anything, cruelty, violence even, from the man they loved. Perhaps –

It was clear to him, as he stood up and let the sodden clothes fall heavily from his body to the floor, that, though the storm had washed away a great load of bitterness and misunderstanding, the problem of Daisy was not yet solved.

Bible Brown[1]

BY H. M. TOMLINSON

THAT romantic seaport town of the Orient made him uneasy. He wanted to get away from it. Yet how it had attracted him once – but that was when it was only a fine name on the map of the coast where the Indian Ocean meets the China Sea. Its upheaval of life startled him with a hint that it was without mind, and did not know its power and what it was doing. This life seemed to have no intelligence: it was driven by blind impulse, even to its own destruction. Humanity would go on, without knowing why, and without getting anywhere, till its momentum failed.

He would have to get away from the place. If Christ himself were there he would have to pull a jinrickshaw till he dropped, or sweat from sunrise to dark in an evil barge, even if he were lucky enough to escape one of those many diseases with a course as certain, in that climate, as a spark in tinder. He would have no name, though he had God's last word to men. He would be only a bubble on that broad tide, and when he went out who would notice it on such a flood?

But questions about human life in the East might just as well be addressed to the silent jungle, at the back of the town. That was fecund, coarse, and rank. No way was to be found through it. It climbed for air and light, and clung to its neighbours, glued itself to them and choked them or was choked, coiled in strong sappy lengths, was full of thorns and poisons, though sometimes it had a beautiful blossom and a sweet smell. The seaport was like the jungle. Its people flowing in dense streams incessantly through its streets were moved by powers without more purpose or conscience than the unseen causes of the jungle and the coral reefs. These Chinese were not men and women, but conflicting torrents. And the white people only appeared to be indifferent. But they were not. They were fewer, and so more noticeable.

[1] From *Tidemarks*, by H. M. Tomlinson, by permission of Messrs. Cassell & Co., Ltd.

They were drifting on the same casual flood. They kept themselves cleaner and safer by superior cunning; but they were going the same way, with the same barbarous indifference. Duty was whatever was most pleasant. Beauty was as far as the sunrise and sunset. Conscience was a funny prohibition of freedom. He would have regretted that he had left England, only he began to see that the Orient, London, and the jungle, were all driven by the same unknown causes to an undesigned end. Human life had come to the earth, just as fungus comes at a certain incidence of moisture and warmth, and as it would slough when the right focus faded. All these movements of life would slow and stop as unreasonably as they began and continued, and nobody would ever know why.

Some of the men he met there enjoyed it. They preferred life without any restrictions. They quoted Kipling – they were always quoting Kipling. You were broad-minded if you did as you pleased. Places like Malay Street were in the nature of things in the tropics, like hibiscus blossoms and fevers. It was no good expecting tabernacle notions to he helpful in that climate. Nothing mattered in life except to see that you did not get stung through carelessness when taking the honey.

He would have to get out of it. He boarded a little coasting steamer and then learned she was bound for Siam. Anywhere would do. Bangkok would be another heaving pool of men, but there would be an interval of the sea between, which would take some time to cross. He had thought, when he left London, that he was escaping the shadow of the War, which was the shadow of humanity without a head; but either that shadow was everywhere or else it was indistinguishable from his own. She was an old, neat, and homely little steamer. The *Brunei* could have been lowered into the hold of a liner. She might have been a token out of the past of what had been good and solid. Yet her character would have been plain only to a sailor or an experienced traveller, because her lower deck was a tumult of Malay and Chinese passengers and her crew of natives, and parrots, and shouting Chinese stevedores; and cargo hurtling through the air on hooks and slings.

There were four other saloon passengers, English planters and

traders. One shared his cabin. That fellow was already occupying it, grunting as he stripped himself, 'to get into something dry.' The cabin smelt of his acrid body. 'I've been ringing for that damn Chinese steward for ten minutes. Seen him about? I want a drink . . . but I know what it is. They're trying to hold me off. I'll have it though, I'll have that drink and another. Bible Brown can't stop me.'

'Who's he?'

'Don't you know him? He's the skipper. The only man out here who thanks God at table with his head bowed over tinned food. It's a fact.' His cabin mate chuckled while his head struggled with his shirt. 'And he's against the booze and the ladies. But I ain't. Not in this God-forsaken world. How does he live?' His cabin mate dropped his heavy bulk suddenly on the settee and began to pull off his drawers.

So he left that small place to his chance companion. The collars, hair-brushes, cigar-boxes, boots, and clothes of that big, prompt, perspiring fellow were scattered over both bunks, the hooks, and the floor. Just forward of the cabin a little man in uniform was leaning over the rail, and in a mild voice was calling some advice to the lower deck. Then the little man turned wearily and absently, but saw him and surveyed him with friendly eyes for a moment in a detachment which seemed to put centuries between them.

'Good morning. Are you Mr. Royden? I've a parcel for you. Come with me.' The little man led the young Royden to a door over the top of which was the word Captain. The uproar of the anchorage remained outside that cabin; it might have been an insulated compartment. Over a table by the forward bulkhead, between two port-windows looking ahead, was a card with a bright floral design round the text, 'Lo, I am with you always.' A pair of spectacles rested on a large Bible, which lay beside a blotting-pad covered with shipping documents.

'We shall be leaving in an hour, Mr. Royden. I hope you will be comfortable aboard. She's very small, this ship, and bad when she rolls, but she'll stand anything.' The captain looked up at his tall young passenger, and touched his arm in a reassuring way; he seemed tired and grey, as if he were holding on to a task of

which now he knew the best and worst. His clipped and grizzled moustache and square chin checked any easy presumption on his good nature which might have been encouraged by his kindly brown eyes. 'If you want any books to read, there you are,' said the captain. He nodded to a small glass-fronted cupboard. Royden took one step and glanced at the books with interest. Then he shook his head. He would not have shown that smile about it, only when he turned the captain met his look with whimsical amusement. 'I thought not,' said Bible Brown. 'Yet I don't know how I should have lived without them, out here, out here.' The captain talked of politics, of the war, and of the affairs of the big town just outside, as though these were matters he had certainly heard about, were matters which experience teaches a man he should expect to meet in this world, and may take his notice for a moment from the real concerns of life. So Royden had been in the War, in France? Yes? He gazed at his passenger thoughtfully for a second, but asked no questions. Royden felt a little indignant. That had been the most awful thing in history; and he had seen it. But this cold little man, with his Bible, thought nothing of human life. That didn't worry him. He didn't care what became of it.

All that day they were passing the land, close in. That coast must have been the same when the earliest travellers saw it. Man had made no impression on it. It had defeated his feverish activities with a tougher and more abundant growth. The gloom of its forests looked like a sullen defiance. It would give no quarter. The turmoil of humanity at the big seaport from which they had sailed that morning appeared to have less significance than ever. This jungle, with the least chance, would push that swarm of men and women into the sea again. The day died in flames behind the forest, a dread spectacle of wrath, as in a final effort, soon surrendered, to light an earth abandoned to dark savagery. Let it go.

The *Brunei* was in ultimate night, carrying her own frail glints, apparently nowhither. There was nothing in sight. The stars were hidden. There was only the melancholy chant of the surge, the song of the bodiless memory of an earth which had passed.

On the lower deck, just showing in the feeble glow of a few lamps hanging from the beams, was what appeared to be a cargo of bundles of coloured rags. The native passengers were compliant. Not a sound came from there.

Beneath the nearest of the lamps a little child lay asleep on its back beside a shapeless heap of crimson cloth. With its ivory skin it looked as though it were dead, in that light. Its tiny face expressed repose and entire confidence. One arm was stretched out, as though it had reached for something it wanted before it died, but the hand was empty, and the forgetful fingers were half-closed over the palm. On the deck above, the three planters, round a table, were sitting in their pyjamas, drinking. They were not talking. They appeared to have surrendered to everything, after trying to escape together under the one light in night for company and refuge. They did not look at him.

Royden remembered that the captain had told him he might go up to the bridge whenever he felt like it. He fumbled in the gloom forward of the deck-house for the handrail of the ladder to the bridge, and felt his way up. For a moment he thought nobody was there, that the ship had been left to go where she pleased. Then he saw the head of a Malay, just the head in the darkness, apparently self-luminous, suspended, and with its eyes cast downwards, as though steadfastly contemplating the invisible body it had left. In another moment Royden saw the head was bent over the binnacle. Then he heard a mild voice, as though it came from the sea, beyond the ship: 'Here I am.' The captain was at the extremity of the starboard side of the bridge. The little man was only a shadow even when Royden stood next to him. He was leaning his arms on the rail, looking ahead. Neither spoke for some time. Nothing was to be seen ahead. There was no light, and no sea.

'I suppose,' said Bible Brown presently, 'the other passengers below are drinking.'

'Yes. Well, some are sleeping.'

The captain made no comment. Royden said, after a pause, 'You must get a curious view of us. You see an old habit or two of ours, for a few days, and then you see us no more.'

Still the captain was silent. When he spoke, he said, 'You are mostly alike. You are simple enough. I know you.'

Royden was slightly startled. The old fellow had never seen him before. But he smiled to himself when he thought that these cranks, too, were all alike.

'You are all alike,' continued the captain. 'I see you once – once or twice – and not again. You cannot help yourselves. . . . Sometimes I wish I could help you, but there is no time. You all know where you are going, and you are gone too quickly.'

The complete assurance of the old fellow! But what did he care for humanity after all?

'You are going to Bangkok, Mr. Royden, aren't you?' asked the captain. 'Some voyages ago I had a passenger for there. Young like you, but a girl, a child. She had come out from England. She was a little different from the rest of you. I thought she looked like my own daughter. Couldn't make out what she was going to do in a place like that – an innocent girl of about twenty. She asked me some funny questions about Bangkok. I could see she was frightened. Then it came out. A native prince had sent her money, and there she was, going to marry him. Do you know what that means? Well, I told her. Told her how many wives he had already. She cried. She didn't know till then. But do you think I could help her? No, Mr. Royden. She had taken the money, and spent it, and there she was. She said she was forced to do it now. It was her duty. I had to leave her at Bangkok. She was bound to go, she said. . . . Poor little soul.'

They both stared ahead. There it was entirely dark. The sound of the surge, to Royden, was like the drowning of his own thoughts. All were drifting. Nobody really knew where they were going, nor why. Not even Bible Brown.

'I can't make out, captain,' he said, 'how you find your way in a darkness like this.'

'Find my way? This darkness is nothing. It is a fine night. I know my course. There is the compass. The darkness is nothing. I keep my course. To-morrow we shall be off Tumpat. I know where I am.'

The Enemy in Ambush[1]

BY HUGH WALPOLE

I

CAPTAIN JOHN FORD lodged, in Moscow, with the family Ivanoff. He had been directed by the English Consulate to the family Ivanoff, the lady of the house being used to officers, the flat being in a pleasant part of the town (Krivvarbatsky Pereonlok, D.11. k.s.), and the food 'simple but excellent.' He had arrived with a great many boxes at the beginning of September and (of course, he did not realize this) Mme. Ivanoff's heart had sunk when she saw him. She had had English officers in her house now for fifteen years, but she had never seen anyone so alarming as Captain John Ford. He was handsome but stiff as a deal board. His clothes were surely made of iron, such creases were there in the trousers, so severe were the sleeves of his jacket: he was very tall and very thin, with eyes like cold blue stones, a brown moustache that expressed in its every hair haughty and contemptuous surprise, and black shining boots that showed her, poor woman, that before many days were over Masha would incur his severest displeasure.

She would have liked to say that her rooms were all occupied, but she had just then no one at all and needed the money. She looked at his healthy, tanned, and self-satisfied countenance, and her knees trembled. However, Mme. Ivanoff was a brave woman. She thought of Kostia, of Anna, of little Vladimir. . . . She said that she was delighted to see him.

2

Captain Ford's first impression was that he couldn't have believed there could have been such a country. Certainly the weather during the first days towards the end of September was not propitious. It rained very often; the mud rose higher and

[1] From *The Silver Thorn*, by Hugh Walpole, by permission of Messrs. Macmillan & Co., Ltd.

higher in the streets; on many days a thick heavy pall hung over the place and everyone walked with bent shoulders, as though they dreaded a blow. The houses seemed to be made of *papier mâché*, the towers of gold and blue and green were cheap and tawdry, and the noise of the clanging trams was deafening. The Isvoschiks splashed mud over Captain Ford's trousers, and officious people were always attempting to take his coat, hat, and stick away from him when he wished to retain them. No one walked on the right side of the street, church bells were always ringing when he wanted to slumber. At the opera he was late and had to stand in the passage during a whole act, he tumbled continually over holes in the pavement, and was kept waiting in his bank two hours before they gave him his money.

'I simply couldn't have believed such a country possible,' he said to himself again and again. . . .

Then the Ivanoff family was like nothing that he'd ever known. Mme. Ivanoff herself, soft and fluffy and plump with eyes that were always filling with tears, and the prettiest broken English, had been in the opinion of many English officers 'a dear little woman.' They wrote to her long after they had left her and told her that one day they would come back to live in Russia. She treasured their letters in a box that one of them had given her with 'A Present from Brighton' in red paint on the lid. But Captain Ford simply found her irritating. She was frightened with him, and when she gave him lessons in the morning lost her head, forgot her English, and sometimes even her Russian.

'I'm afraid I don't quite understand you,' his moustache would say to her.

'Oh! How say it in Engleesh? What is that word – yes? You know – 'appy, merry, gay – no not gay. Ah – *Tak!*' And he would wait with a terrible patience, staring just over her head at the ikon in the corner of the room.

Then she was certainly absent-minded and believed that good-nature was of more value than sharpness of intellect. She simply wanted life to be pleasant for everyone and was never happier than when six stout ladies of her acquaintance came early in the afternoon, and played lotto with her until dinner-time. Her husband

also wished life to be pleasant. He was an inventor who had, many years ago, had considerable success with a patent clip that held papers for you with an iron clasp above your writing table. Since then he had invented many things – boot polish, a new way of peeling oranges, a game with horses and counters, a book rest, and a collapsible chair that became an umbrella stand when you had sat upon it long enough. Only the paper clip had been really successful, but he lived in great hope and was one of the most cheerful people in Moscow, except at sudden moments of utter despair, when he loudly proclaimed his disdain of God, and told the cook (very much a friend of the family) that he intended to commit suicide before nightfall. He was a little man with a red moustache and large blue baby eyes – he was sentimental and absolutely credulous; he believed anything that anyone told him.

The children, Kostia, Anna, and Vladimir, were just like other children, loved their parents but only occasionally obeyed them, made a tremendous noise, cried and laughed and sang. Kostia, however, was now a boy of fourteen and was beginning to regard life seriously. He read the newspaper, was often grave and silent, and patronized his father. But the most remarkable member of the family was Uncle Anton, Mr. Ivanoff's brother. Some people might have said that he was not quite right in his head, but all eccentricities were forgiven him for his 'remarkable ideas.'

'What kind of ideas?' said Captain Ford suspiciously when Mme. Ivanoff first told him this.

'Wonderful things,' said Mme. Ivanoff, 'about Russia, and God, and the Soul of Man.'

'Really!' was all Captain Ford said.

Uncle Anton was remarkable to look upon, a giant of a man with a long brown untidy beard, shaggy brown eyebrows, and a mop of utterly uncared-for hair. He was dirty and shabby and sometimes not quite decent in his appearance. He ate his food in a horrible manner, blew his soup all over the table, and gnawed bones in his hands like a savage. What Captain Ford thought of these things may be imagined – no consolation to him that Uncle Anton loved humanity and would walk a mile rather than tread on a worm – no consolation at all. But the worst of it was that

Uncle Anton took, from the first, a great liking to Captain Ford. 'Here is a proper man,' he said, 'a man to whom I can talk,' and talk to him he did. It was one of Mme. Ivanoff's hardest tasks to keep Uncle Anton out of Captain Ford's room. 'He has other interests,' she would tell her brother-in-law. 'He is different from us.'

'All men are the same,' Uncle Anton replied, smiling down upon her. 'We are all brothers. My heart is warm towards him.'

Indeed, at first, the hearts of all the family were warm; they were prepared absolutely to make Captain Ford one of themselves. But Captain Ford did not like vodka, hated schee, could not touch little cucumbers, and had a real terror of Rabcheek. He watched with paralysed fascination little Vladimir's manner of mastication. Uncle Anton's preoccupation with a chicken bone paled the soldier's bronzed cheek.

Then he had never, at any time, been a great conversationalist. He had always distrusted talkers, and one of his favourite dicta was: 'If you've got something you want to say, just think first as to whether it's really worth while. You're sure to find it isn't.' The Ivanoff's certainly never thought first. They said exactly what came into their heads, talking all together, screaming and shouting if necessary, happy and friendly and merry. Mme. Ivanoff soon discovered that Captain Ford disliked noise at meal times, and she did her best – but unfortunately her memory was short, she was easily excited, and her apologies afterwards seemed to give him very little pleasure. Other Englishmen had smiled at the noise and confusion. Captain Ford looked as though he were called on by his country to perform an especially hazardous and unpleasant duty. It was evident to anyone that he was not happy. There were many other little things. He wanted a cold bath every morning, and that should have been simple enough, but the taps were eccentric, the water was sometimes brown and thick, the catch would not fasten on the bathroom door (upon one occasion when the Captain was in his bath Uncle Anton entered, and, instead of retiring, proposed that they should have a bath together). Then there was the matter of 'the wash.' In England this was a perfectly regular affair. You sent your washing on

Monday and received it back again on Friday; but here, whatever you might do or say, 'the wash' had its own habits and customs. Frequently the arrival of Prazniky would delay things for a fortnight or so. Masha would be sent to the laundry with orders to die rather than return without the Captain's collars. Nevertheless she did return without them; she had had a wonderful conversation with the head of the laundry – he was an agreeable man and hoped by next Tuesday or Wednesday to have discovered most of the Captain's things.

'You see what it is – *on nas*,' said Mme. Ivanoff, smiling happily.

'But, good God! –' cried the Captain.

He shut himself then into an impenetrable reserve, and the family regarded him with frightened eyes. He felt their terror and was irritated by it. He flung himself into the learning of Russian with a ferocity and pertinacity that were devastating. He was not very clever, but of an amazing doggedness. His accent was appalling, but he never made a mistake in grammar. It promised to be a dismal winter for the Ivanoffs. . . .

3

Then, a few weeks before Christmas, Captain Ford discovered that something was the matter with him. The weather improved. The snow had fallen, and there came a succession of shining crystal days when the colours of the sky were reflected in shadowed lights on the white ground, when the towers of gold and green and blue hung, on misty evenings, like rounded clouds about the stars, when the eccentric shapes and patterns of the Moscow streets were romantic roads leading into mysterious countries, when every ugliness took on beauty and every commonplace comer seemed to watch with a smile, half-hidden, half-pathetic, half-expectant. Captain Ford was uncomfortable. Entirely against his will he began to think of his young days when he had loved a lady in the Gaiety chorus, had thought her a model of virtue and modesty, had even written poetry to her. There had indeed been a summer night when he had driven her out to Hampstead in a hansom, and had appealed to the moon to witness his devotion. Ah! how he had laughed at himself since then, and what fools

other young fellows with an equal romantic folly had seemed to him. There had been a moment, after his marriage with Mrs. Ford, when he had been threatened with some return of this same nonsense. It had been Mrs. Ford herself then who had laughed at him: 'Why, John!' she had cried (they were at Monte Carlo on their honeynoon), 'I had no idea you'd got that kind of rot in you!'

Afterwards, with a shadow of that same idealism, he had hoped for a son, but Mrs. Ford had thought it unwise of them to start a family when their income was still so slender, and they had decided to wait. They were waiting yet.

Now, in spite of himself, Moscow was making him uncomfortable. When, late after some dinner party, he was driving home in his isvoschik, he would curse the cold and the bumping roads and the slowness of his horse, and behind that cursing there would be stealing a strange warm, happy feeling of contentment as the white streets ran in lines of light through the dark, uneven walls. The watchmen's fires leaping at the street corners, the thin flames burning before the ikons, the Russian peace of that vast Russian night that covers so spacious and silent a land touching him with its cool hand, whispering to him with its friendly voice. By Christmas he had told himself that, if he did not care, he would one day be making a fool of himself, he would be actually growing fond of the country. Now this fear of making a fool of himself was a very real terror indeed and was perhaps all the stronger in him now because he had shut himself up so tightly these last months. Christmas Eve was a hard day for him in this fashion: he bought presents for the Ivanoff children (fine presents, too), but would not come to the Christmas Tree. They, however, emboldened by this happy excitement, came into his room and thanked him, and Vladimir (aged five) wished to kiss him. From this, fortunately, he was prevented. Captain Ford was very stiff with them and seemed angry at their little speeches.

'Not at all. Not at all,' he said. 'Nitchevo. Nitchevo.'

Then at supper the family gave him presents: Mme. Ivanoff a copy of Tutchev's poetry, Mr. Ivanoff a Russian tobacco box, and Uncle Anton a little brass ikon. He was terribly embarrassed;

he had nothing to say. 'Thanks. Really – hum – *blagardaryoo vass* – hum – thanks.' He wished with all his heart that he had arranged to dine that night with some English friends.

It happened then, in the early part of the year, that he saw performances at the Artistic Theatre of *The Cherry Orchard* and *The Three Sisters*. He was moved unexpectedly and, as he told himself, quite unreasonably. He had not been at any time a student of the theatre, but he was used in England to a comfortable play that began at nine o'clock punctually, had a story that a baby could understand, with well-known performers in it, some of whom he knew in his club and others who came to have tea with his wife. Moreover, it was one of his theories that a play must not be depressing. 'Worries enough,' he would say to his friends, 'in ordinary life, without your books and plays being worrying too. That's what *I* say' – and was apparently quite unaware that all his friends said the same thing. He had, then, no right to be anything but disgusted by *The Cherry Orchard* and *The Three Sisters*. Here were two plays depressing and inconclusive. Characters came in and out at their own pleasure, uttered remarks quite carelessly and without purpose, seemed to have no idea that they were in a play at all. At the end of the evening no one was settled for life – indeed, anyone who, at the beginning of the play, was settled, was seen to be unsettled by the end of it. Moreover, none of the actors looked like actors nor had, apparently any consciousness that the play would fall to pieces if they were not in it. It was all desperately unlike anything of which Captain Ford could be expected to approve, and yet he discovered in himself an increasing consciousness of disturbed alarm. It was exactly as though he were reconnoitring in some enemy's country, was aware that a man, in ambush, was waiting for him and that every step might bring him leaping upon him. 'One of these days I shall make a fool of myself if I'm not careful' . . . There was his enemy in ambush, an enemy serious enough in all conscience, because, having made a fool of one's self once, it is only too possible that one may do so again, and then again, and at last be a fool altogether. In the love of Madame Ranevsky, of Gayef, for their house and orchard, in the burning passion of Masha and

Vershinin that glows like a dark fire at the very heart of *The Three Sisters*, he found the footsteps, the very secret marks of his enemy. Had he missed the whole purpose and meaning of life? Had he driven from him everything that life was intended to give to the soul of man? At that thought he shook himself as though he would wake from an evil dream. What had he to do with the soul of man? Was he not an English officer and a man of practical common sense? He might as well be that drunken old idiot, Uncle Anton, at once. He was stiffer than ever with the Ivanoff family. . . .

But the worst of it was that Uncle Anton, whom it was impossible to rebuff, whose childlike trust and simplicity saw what they wanted to see and not what they were told to see, insisted on treating him as though he alone in real truth knew Captain Ford as, in the depths of his heart, he was.

'You love this country,' he said standing over him and putting a big dirty hand on his shoulder. 'You love this country. It is stealing every day more deeply into your heart. I know that this is so and that after you have left us you will long always to return. You will have a great hunger . . .', a ridiculous way for one man to talk to another.

It happened, then, that as the weeks of the new year increased Captain John Ford longed every day more passionately to escape. He hurled himself at his Russian and made remarkable progress. The Ivanoffs, with the exception of Uncle Anton, were now really afraid of him, and felt his stiff unfriendliness like a cloud about the house. It could not be said that they awaited his departure with sorrow, nevertheless, in their way they were proud of him. 'You never saw such an Englishman,' they would tell their friends, 'so proud and stiff. He never opens his lips. The children are so quiet you wouldn't know them – a fine man, a proper Englishman.'

Then Mrs. Ford wrote to say that in the course of her travels she had reached Sebastopol, would travel home through Russia, and would pick him up on her way. 'I'm sure you'll be glad to get home again,' she said, 'after all the queer people you've been seeing. . . .'

Why was it that, in reading her letter, he had the strangest feeling that his wife wasn't real? Oh, yes! He had certainly been out of England long enough. He waited with impatience and also with a strange anxiety his wife's arrival.

4

Mrs. Ford arrived: she was a brisk little woman, who stood on her toes and pecked at the world like a bright, hard little bird. Very smart in her dress, the impression she gave was that she despised above everything else waste of time. She even clipped her sentences.

'Well, John, here I am. Leave to-morrow 10.30. Must. Promised the Andersons be back in time for the Anderson girl's wedding. Poor dear – how odd you look – want some new clothes.'

Her evening meal with the Ivanoffs was a strange business. She talked brightly and sharply, looking just over Mme. Ivanoff's shoulder. Mme. Ivanoff hated her at the very first glance, which was odd, because Mme. Ivanoff never hated people. The whole family hated Mrs. Ford, and she remained for many years after in the minds of the Ivanoff children as a picture of dreadful, devastating tyranny. Uncle Anton also disliked her so much that he would not speak at all during the meal and was heard to mutter to himself later in the evening: 'My poor dear friend! My poor dear friend.'

And this was the strangest part of it, that, in the light of the newly revealed Mrs. Ford, the Captain, who had been throughout the winter a terror and a depression, was suddenly a victim. The Ivanoff family discovered that it had really loved him all the time, and to allow him to be carried away in the charge of such a woman was a piercing tragedy. He was going away to-morrow! Why, they would miss him! They were not sure that they were not prouder of him than of any Englishman that they had ever had. Upon that evening there was developed a sudden intimacy, and Mme. Ivanoff could not help looking at him with mysterious glances, and Ivanoff himself was grievously tempted to press his hand.

Meanwhile John Ford was in a strange condition. That impression that he had had on reading his wife's letter of her unreality oddly persisted. When she spoke to him he felt as though he were looking at something through a looking glass – take the glass away and the reflection went with it. She was like a memory that he didn't wish to remember or a photograph of a college cricketing team. Moreover, he knew, quite desperately, that he didn't wish to go to-morrow. That strange dread that had been creeping daily more close to him was now very near indeed.

'I *shall* make an awful ass of myself if I'm not careful,' he said to himself, looking at his wife.

Before they parted for the night he looked at Uncle Anton and with a shock of surprise, thought, 'I believe he *is* the only man who's ever really known me!' He lay sleepless all night beside the unreal body of his wife; his foot touched hers, and it was as though someone had asked him to repeat the Latin verses that he used to learn when he was a boy at school. When the early dawn lit her face he felt a sudden impulse to get up and run for miles and miles into the very heart of Russia and there be lost.

He did not run – his training had been too thorough for that – but the parting in the morning was strangely moving. Mrs. Ford said good-bye briskly and with a bright air of relief because she would never see these appalling people again.

'Come, John, we shall miss our train.'

The Captain stood, looking very English.

'I'm coming,' he said.

He seemed to be waiting for her to start down the stairs, as though he had got something very special and private to say, but when she had gone, all he said was:

'Well, well, good-bye, Mrs. Ivanoff – very kind – yes. Well, well –'

He tipped the children; Uncle Anton made a rush at him, stopped halfway, rushed back and closed the door of his room. Captain Ford, with eyes that were for the first time in the experience of the Ivanoffs soft and human, made a dash for the stairs as though he were pursued.

'Good-bye . . . Good-bye . . . Good-bye,' they cried.

They had hired a motor-car, and Mrs. Ford was already sitting in it.

'Well, what people!' she said. 'We've just nice time for the train.'

The car had started when suddenly the Captain leaned out of the window and stopped it. 'I've forgotten something,' he said to his wife.

He jumped out of the car, dashed down the street, and was through the door of the building. He rang the bell of the Ivanoff flat. Masha opened it; he pushed past her, and without knocking on the door, broke into Uncle Anton's room. Uncle Anton was standing, a huge figure, before his window peering down into the street.

He turned round.

'It's only,' Ford, who was breathless, stammered, 'that I hadn't – said good-bye.'

He held out both his hands. Uncle Anton took them, then kissed them gravely three times. Captain Ford, who had never before in his life been kissed by a man said, still breathlessly:

'I'm coming back. . . . I wanted you to know. . . . I'm coming back.'

'Of course,' Uncle Anton said.

He hurried away and was in the car again.

'But, John,' his wife said, 'whatever . . . ! The train . . .'

He said nothing. He stared out of the window. The first warmth of spring was in the air. The streets were running with streams of water, blue from the reflection of the sky. The ikon above the gate in the Lubiansky Prospekt shone and glittered; the air seemed to be full of a noise of bells and hammers. The row of booths with their dolls and fruit, their hideous china ornaments, and their wooden toys were reflected with all their colours in the pools of water. John Ford drew a deep sigh. Then nodded to himself.

He knew that his enemy had made his spring, and he was glad.

Blessed are the Meek

BY MARY WEBB

THE workhouse dozed in the Sunday afternoon hush. In the old women's room all was very quiet; only a single bee groped clumsily up and down the shut windows, seeking the free air, flowers, the sounding hives.

The gloomy July afternoon laid an atmosphere of disillusionment over everything. The sky was of the same sad grey as the workhouse stockings. Ninety-eight feet, clad in these stockings, were posed in various attitudes down the long room, swinging, tapping, crossed, or set out stilly side by side like those on tombs.

Forty-nine women, dressed in decent Sunday garments with white aprons, sat in rows on benches facing one another. Forty-nine souls, varied and strange and wistful, clamant for delight as the bee, were shut in here. All these life-stories, full of sad and joyous and wild happenings, had stopped here, and were only waiting for Death to break the final thread. Life was over. They were conscious of it, dumbly, uncomplainingly. They could not have been more completely sundered from their past lives if they had died and gone to Purgatory. But every heart, in this house that was not home, kept, clear and changeless, the picture of the home it had lost; of garden, shippen and fold; all the small, precious, sacramental things surrounding their busy lives – things they had hardly known to be precious until they were lost. For in those homes they had been individuals, centres of warmth and love. Here they were herded in a cold, almost derisive comfort; and through the long grey corridors the feet of the flame-clad, the laughter-bringer, the tear-giver – Love, were seldom heard.

They were knitting more grey stockings to wear when the others should be worn out. Their balls of wool, all exactly the same, lay beside them, and a blue-eyed kitten, passionately in love with itself, raced up and down the lines of passive feet and bullied the stout, unresisting balls.

[1] From *Armour Wherein He Trusted*, by Mary Webb, by permission of Messrs. Jonathan Cape, Ltd.

'I'd lief be you!' said Fidelia Thatcher, who sat – tall, emaciated, white-capped – at the window end of a bench.

'That's a wicked imagination, Fidelia!'

This came from a neighbour, a stout, rosy old woman.

'Cats 'anna got souls,' she added.

Fidelia raised mild eyes, and her sweet, obstinate mouth took a firmer line as she said:

'Soul or no, I'd lief be that kit-cat.'

Her face, tanned golden by decades of suns and snows, had the dignity of an ancient Egyptian bas-relief. And though her long upper lip, high forehead, and arched nose were intimidating, her eyes – dark and dovelike, brooding upon the furiously energetic kitten and the anxious bee – were beautiful as the eyes of a heifer. Her large hands, twisted and swollen at the knuckles from years of work, lay quietly in the white union apron. She dreamed herself into the past. She was desperately afraid that in this place she might some day cease to believe in that past – in all the blossomy days that stretched away backwards from the day of her entrance here to her clover-scented childhood. To forget them would be like breaking faith with a lover.

One casement below and one above. What could a lone woman have wanted more? A pink rose-tree, a white rose-tree, and a lilac. These had presided over her garden. The white lupins had grown as tall as herself, and stood beside the wicket in pale dignity, like swordless angels. Her pigeons sunned themselves on the roof and paraded the tiles with soft pink feet. And, hearing the pattering enthusiasm of those pink feet above her attic morning by morning, and seeing the round cheeks of the roses pressed so confidingly against her window, she had almost forgotten that none would ever call her mother. Ah! Where was it now, that warm, scented peace? Where were those glad, laborious days when she scrubbed and rinsed the butter-mits at the farm, returning in the evening with her perquisites of milk or pork or butter, with her small wage and her large content, and having her simple supper while dusk fell and the owls began to stir?

No conqueror of the world ever fought a harder, a grimmer battle than Fidelia's battle against Fate – against hunger and the

grey defeat that was its alternative. She had 'clemmed' and she had sweated. It was over now. She sat, a shade among shades, neither in Hell nor Heaven.

She rose and let out the bee. At the sudden cessation of its note the atmosphere grew more tense and heavy.

'Theer!' she said. 'Out o' prison.'

'Prison? What for, "prison"?' asked a flat-faced, meek woman. 'We gets our bellyful and a bed.'

'What's meat?' cried Fidelia suddenly, out of her bitterness. 'What's meat, with no heart to eat it? What's sleep with naught to wake for in the morning light?'

Down the benches ran a rustle and a sigh, like the wind in old, dry-leaved trees. There were murmurs.

'That's Gospel!'

'That's the righteous truth!'

'Delia's i' the right, no danger!'

With faces turned towards her as to a prophetess, they took courage to remember the days gone by. Those days, those homes, those fields, those dear lost faces shone in their souls with the peculiar lustre that mingled love and tears give to the human memory, like the carven ivories that were painted long ago in silver and gold and rich, dim enamels, and studded with burning gems.

'I mind,' said one, 'ah! I mind as if it was yesterday –'

At the magic of those words, 'I mind,' these pictures of the soul took shape and colour; from homely sentences and broken phrases, a sigh, a tear; so that to every eye in the room the dun-coloured walls were obliterated, glowing like painted windows, garlanded with memories, hung with the little eikons of forty-nine homes. Even the flat-faced materialist had possessed a home, and she was as jealous of its recollection as an ugly woman of a lover.

The balls of sad-coloured wool became inextricably tangled, as the exultant kitten seized her happy hour. Stockings were forgotten. Grey was forgotten. The matron was forgotten. Even the solemn festival that was to take place this very evening was forgotten.

'Cushat-doves!' murmured Fidelia in a low and dreamy voice. 'I kept cushat-doves. And my gyarden most always had a flower.'

'Dahlias was what our maister was set on,' said a very old woman with bright blue eyes. 'Ah! he liked a dahlia.'

'Roses, ours fancied,' put in the stout woman.

'Ah! I clem for the smell of a cabbage rose,' said Fidelia.

She became mysterious, and dived into the deep pocket of her skirt.

'Look ye!' she whispered. 'I couldna bide all summer without the smell of a cabbage rose. And this morning they'd left the ladder by our ward windy, being fluskered with the Bishop coming. So I crep' out and went to the matron's gyarden afore it was light and pulled this 'ere.'

She held up a deep red rose amid cries of admiration and reproof.

And just as she held it up, the matron entered.

'That's the third time you've trespassed, broken bounds, and stolen,' said the matron wearily. She was a kind-hearted woman, but her promotion depended on the strictness of her discipline. She was part of a machine. If it was a bad machine, she had neither time nor inclination to try to alter it.

'You'll stop away from service at the chapel to-night, and you won't go to the harvest tea at the Rectory,' said the matron. Fidelia's Egyptian profile was unmoved; but tears stood in her eyes. Festivals were very few, and the harvest tea was the event of the year.

There was a sound of wheels. The Bishop! He entered with the Rector and some ladies. Everyone stood up. Only the kitten remained unimpressed.

The Bishop had thought, as he saw the workhouse from a turn of the road, that it looked dreary. He had thought that it would be good to turn the eyes of these old women to the mansions of the blest. He was really kind and sympathetic, only he was not gifted with imagination, and he had never been an old, homesick, knitting woman on a bench. So he said cheerfully, 'Suppose we sing

"Jerusalem, my happy home!"'

and then, in lighter vein,

"Home, sweet home!"'

He intended to weave these into his speech, and only to bring in the mention of the consecration of the chapel towards the end.

They sang,

'Jerusalem, my happy home!'

It was a little quavering, a little irregular, but that was put down to age.

Towards the end came an audible sound from Fidelia. Then they sang,

'Home, sweet home!'

What with the memories, and the talk, and Fidelia's sob, there were a good many sniffs and surreptitious wipings of eyes.

In the last line Fidelia flung her apron over her head and wept aloud.

'Thatcher!' said the matron.

'There, there!' soothed the Bishop; and he gave her shoulder a little pat, and told her to sit down, and was sure his speech would comfort her.

But, alas! his speech did not comfort. It lacerated. It destroyed the pictures that had glowed on the wall. It hammered to pieces the little eikons of home. It built up a picture of Heaven which had in it no touch of the loved fold and cottage, but which appeared to ninety-eight alarmed eyes to be exactly like the workhouse. It was grand and large and rather pompous. It had nothing in it of firelit evenings and the bit of sewing and father winding the clock. And the more the Bishop struggled to comfort a sorrow he could not grasp, the more formal he became.

When he had finished, Fidelia emerged from her apron, and her face was that of one who has been through an agony.

So that was Heaven!

No lilac. No pink rose, no white rose. No work. No pink feet on the tiles. Nothing but an enormous, everlasting old women's ward built of solid gold, and without even a kitten.

She looked at the Bishop and beheld him as a thief, robbing her of all hope. She had thought, without exactly formulating her thought, that Heaven would be a place with homely corners in it where the poor might dwell as of old. This man was robbing her of her dream, and it was all she had. She stood up.

'It inna true!' she cried. 'It's words, words, words, a mort of words; but it inna true. And if it's true I dunna want it. It's for Squire and Rector and you. It inna for us. We'm lost our whomes; we'm gone back to school like, after working 'ard a many years. And if the Lord, as was but a carpenter's prentice 'isself and the Lord's Mother, as but a carpenter's wife, canna give poor folk a bit o' comfort in the next world, I dunna want to go there.'

She sat down and retired into her apron. Every face on the lines of benches was strained forward towards the group that symbolized authority, waiting for the doom to fall.

'Matron,' said the Bishop, 'the poor thing's over-wrought.'

'Not quite herself,' said the Rector's wife.

'A little – queer. A little – wandering,' added another lady.

'Do not punish her,' said the Bishop. 'The day must not be darkened.'

'But she's hardly responsible, is she?' said a guardian.

The matron, trembling with distress and wrath, whispered to the Rector:

'The asylum side?'

'Yes, yes,' said the Rector in what he meant to be a whisper, 'the asylum side.' But he was a hearty man, used to open-air sports, and his whisper was quite audible.

The visitors went away to tea at the Rectory. Service was not till seven. The old women filed out to their mugs of tea and slabs of bread and margarine. Fidelia remained where she was – a derelict. Discipline was momentarily relaxed becase she did not count any more. The asylum side! The asylum side! She could not understand it. She, Fidelia Thatcher, the best butter-maker in the district, a self-respecting, self-supporting woman, had come to this. To-morrow she would be like a dumb beast driven hither and thither, under physical authority, bathed by attendants, slapped, taken for walks in a drove with imbeciles and lunatics – mad. No home on earth. No home in Heaven – if the Bishop was right.

'No!' she muttered. 'It's lies, what he says.' To-morrow, blackness of darkness; but she had to-night. She must think. She must efface herself to gain time.

The old women's room had a door opening into a paved, flowerless space which ought to have been a garden. Under the roof of the porch was a swallow's nest, hydra-headed with young. Fidelia loved to see the parent birds dart to and fro. She had watched them since they brought the first dabs of mud, until now when the young were ready to fly. She brought out a bench. No one ever came here in the evenings. They would go to the service and forget her. With folded hands, she sat in the corner so still that the birds were not afraid of her.

'Wings!' she murmured. 'Wings!'

But there were no wings for her. Even if she desired to creep away and die by the roadside, she could not, for across the workhouse entrance was a locked gate. She watched the swallows flash across the slack clothes-line on which the grey stockings were dried, dart to the nest with that infinitesimal pause in which the food is miraculously transferred from beak to beak, and sweep away into the silent evening. And the swallows put into her mind what she would do. She fetched the yard broom, and raked down the nest.

'Fly!' she said. 'Ye can!'

The four young swallows were gone into the soft, dove-coloured evening. From the chapel came the sound of the anthem.

'Blessed are the meek.'

Fidelia, with the broom in her hand, looked at the broken house of clay.

'It inna true,' she said to the depths of grey air. 'They binna blessed. Them as is blessed is them as can fly.'

With steady fingers she untied the clothes-line, and looped it over the beam of the porch. She drew forth her rose and smelt it. She saw again the pink rose-tree and the white rose-tree and the lilac. She climbed on to the bench.

'This minute,' she said to herself, 'I be a pauper lunatic by the mercy of men. The next minute I'll make a trial of the mercy of God. Fidelia Thatcher, fly! Ye can!'

And just as the concluding strains of 'Blessed are the meek' sounded harmoniously, Fidelia Thatcher stepped off the bench.

Tambourin Chinois

BY ROMER WILSON

I

THROUGH a sandy waste where twisted pine trees rift and whisper in a sea wind, I wander disconsolately; beyond me a desolate seashore, behind me crested mountains. Over the crest of the mountains crawls a huge stone dragon, down to the plain, past the walled city, past the pine groves through which I shuffle, down to the edge of the Yellow Sea. I am overcome with fatigue. I am abashed as if in the presence of a very old hero, for I am aware that I shuffle in the dust of a dead Empire, in the shadow of the wall of Ten Thousand Li.

As I begin to be amazed my gaping mouth snaps tight. I have no stomach for amazement. I am become a Chinaman.

II

Ah! Maï! Maï! I am at home. This and that need repairing, but I do not intend to spend the necessary money. My wife complains that the moth has eaten into her winter coats, and I understand that my youngest nephew has failed in his examination. He cannot pass, it seems, without a present to the examiner, even under the new *régime* at Pekin.

I sit on my bed and think it is time they lit the stove beneath it. It is cold this evening. The chrysanthemum plants shiver in the cracked Ming bowls and autumn winds tremble against the lattice. I open a book of devotion and console myself with pious reflections. Life is too short to allow of more than a certain amount of bad luck, and in time even I shall be a guest in heaven. I embroider this consolation with a bowl of tea, and soothe my weary spirits with a little opium. The opium charms away my fatigue, and I see the fretted stain of my clothes with a more cheerful eye. Worn clothes seem honourable and becoming, an indication that a man does not waste his substance upon frivolous vanities. I forget that my poverty is the outcome of idle incompetence, I forget that I am a victim of an antiquated system of

education, which since the death of the Empire has marked me out as unnecessary. It is as well to do so, for the past cannot be re-made. Yet, if I had not met this particular misfortune I should have met another, which probably would have been more disgraceful.

III

At length the opium entertains me with a dream.

It seems to me that I am sitting in a well-furnished apartment in my palace. It is thirty or forty years ago. My success in literature at the Hall of Examination has assured me a magnificent income from a government appointment. It is officially winter, and my new cushions show their red side, but the weather is still warm. I am proud of my autumn-blooming almonds and dwarf plums, and my collection of bronzes and porcelain flatter my eye, although half of them are borrowed from friends to do honour to an expected visitor.

My guest arrives, and we find mutual gratification in each possessing equal rank. We spend the day in talk, and partake at frequent intervals of tea and sweetmeats. I am able to offer him fine white finger-grapes, persimmons, pears, and a variety of other fruit, and to while away the time until four o'clock we compose poetry. He is more skilful than I, but I have better taste. At four o'clock we dine, and I am not ashamed of my table. His manners are perfect, and at one point, as he offers me a certain dish, he assures me that it is his favourite beyond question, and that my acceptance of it is alone required to crown it with perfection.

Thus the day passes pleasantly away, and when at length I bid him farewell, the courtyard is white with moonlight.

IV

Now I imagine myself in Pekin on a delightful occasion. I have purchased a little girl twelve years old from her grandmother. She is as delicate as porcelain, and when they have painted her anew with the hue of the cherry, dressed her hair with gold and flowers, and robed her in splendid satins, I find her as refreshing

to my senses as a book of accomplished verse. I name her Yehonala secretly to myself after a high personage, and have her portrait taken upon silk. She is docile, and sings as prettily as a nightingale. She delights me; I see that she would charm away many a sluggish hour, but at length I come to the conclusion that it might be more profitable to send her as a gift to the Imperial Palace.

After a thousand tedious, though necessary, ceremonies, which cost me a great deal of money, she goes within the Yellow Precincts and I return home to meditate upon poverty, and to wait for an honourable distinction in acknowledgment of my little compliment, a distinction which may perhaps fall upon one of my descendants, but which delays to present itself to me.

V

I stay at home and express my disappointment in a sequence of sonnets skilfully turned in the best classical verse. I also plaintively regret my little one in a few good lyrics, and as I attempt to follow her fate with my imagination, I conjure several scenes out of the darkness which cause me apprehension and bring tears to my eyes.

VI

Yehonala quickly adapts herself to the intricacies of court ceremonial, for she has received a good education. She knows that she must lay aside her heart and cease to have any thoughts. She must forget the swallows and the magically warped bamboo, which were her dear companions at home, lest she dim the brilliance of her complexion with the tears of memory. She is relegated to a low rank among the inferior ladies of the Emperor's Palace, but of course finds gratification in the possession of an official title and a dazzling uniform.

VII

Time passes. She becomes the centre of honourable and dangerous circumstances. Good luck has preferred her to the

Emperor's heart, and to this introduction he has been pleased secretly to give his Imperial sanction.

He comes to her gaunt and terrible like a hero in an old romance. His silence is appalling and mysterious. It is the silence of lonely places, and when he sighs against her long black hair she remembers the dying breeze in autumn tree tops. She gazes terrified upon his pale countenance, and does not understand that he loves her. Though he stays long in the moonlit pavilion she thinks his attentions are part of the court ceremonial which wraps the whole earth in a cloak. Undoubtedly she is wedded to heaven. She believes that nothing is hidden from his Imperial eyes, and dare not shudder even when she is alone. Yet songs quiver in the Emperor's heart though he neither expresses nor hears them. He is unskilled in human tenderness. He does not suppose that a woman has any feelings. The sun sets at his command behind the acacias, he summons the moon out of her mountain pavilion, and when night shuts close the windows of the day, he is conveyed in strict invisibility to the Western Summer-house.

VIII

It is no surprise to him to find Yehonala dead upon one of his secret visits. His female relatives do not permit his pleasures to gather too often in the same locality. He sighs wearily, and death draws from his heart words which life had not the power to call forth. When death comes as a sudden guest he finds us unprepared. We fall into confusion, lose countenance, and stammer a great many thoughts we had no intention of uttering.

IX

In his grief the Emperor improvises the following ode, for the Son of Heaven is by birth a poet, and has moreover an inexhaustible knowledge of the classics, from whence he plucks at will suitable adornments for his stanzas.

X

'Why did you leave me, Yehonala? Why did you leave me without intimation or farewell?

'They offered me many golden cups, but I preferred the choice wine which a friend sent me in a humble flagon.

'The flagon is wantonly broken because somebody has discovered my pleasure in it.

'Even now, Sweet Almond-Flower, the little memory of you fades from me.

'You are inconsiderate to be so hasty.

'You do wrong to slip from my side at the first beckoning of another hand, without even permitting me to catch hold of your shadow.

'You found no pleasure in my company perhaps?

'I was too grave, or my habitual silence frightened you.

'I was taught to despise the manners of the peach-blossom and knew no tender words.

'Early in youth pleasure was taken from me, and I fell ill of sorrow.

'When I visited you secretly, you trembled as these petals of your headdress tremble against my forsaken hand.

'Little Golden Shower, you should have recalled delight to me in the absence of my Imperial person.

'Now it is too late. You have deserted me and slipped silently away to the Nether Springs.

'You have mocked me, and also the Emperor, for in your hastiness to escape me, you have forsaken this little pavilion without his Imperial decree.'

The Cage Bird

BY FRANCIS BRETT YOUNG

I

FOR story-telling there is one place that beats all others in the world, and that is a camp-fire in tropical Africa. It has no distractions. Even in a cosy library, with curtained windows and coal-fire burning, one's eyes will wander to the light that plays over the backs of books or watch the creeping hands of a clock. In Africa you get none of these things to disturb you. The world shrinks into a small circle of firelight. Beyond the edge of it nothing exists at all; and within it only the story-teller and his listeners.

And that's not all: the men one meets in the scent of wood-smoke have something to say. There are few books in the bush-veld, and those mostly bad ones; but Africa is a country of full lives, and of these you only hear from the mouths of the men who have lived them. Great story-teller! You sit and listen, and the world drifts away from you so that the sputter of a green branch in the fire makes you jump. And then you see yourself sitting on your haunches, the glow of the fire, the fumes that sting your eyes; and all around you, in a haze of Boer tobacco (that tastes like hay in Europe, but in Africa is the best smoke in the world), you see other listeners who have not awakened and still inhabit the world of enchantment that you have just left. So you reach out for another branch to throw on the fire, or give the embers a kick. And the voice of the chap who is telling the story goes on and on, and on.

The best hand at the game I ever met was Charlie Murray, and he knew it. Get him after a dinner of grilled eland-steak and a peg of whisky, and he'd talk you to sleep; not because his stories were sleepy, but from sheer staying-power. Murray was a tremendous chap. He rode sixteen stone, with long stirrup leathers, like the Boers, so that his feet nearly touched the ground on either side of his rat of a hunting pony. A tall, stiff figure, with shrewd blue eyes, a yellow moustache, and cheeks sun-dried like biltong: a dead shot, and the best of company.

When I knew him he had settled down to ranching on the edge of the Berg, which is the loveliest land in all Africa and as lovely as any in the world. He knew that it was beautiful, and warmed when one praised it; but though his life was busier than that of most men of his age, he lived in the past. And such a past! African born – his father had been a Free-Stater – Murray had fought in five wars. He had seen the map of Africa shaken like a kaleidoscope, and helped to shake it. And yet he was no politician. He knew a man and esteemed him whatever his race or language: Dutch, Kaffir or English were the same to him, for he spoke them all. It sounds as though I am shifting from my point; but that is not so. It is the fairness and sportsmanship of the man's nature that come out so clearly in this queer story of his childhood. You can hear it and say to yourself: 'That's Charlie Murray all over!' From that day to this he has scarcely changed a hair's-breadth. 'Give a man a sporting chance!' – that was Murray's motto in life.

2

It happened, as I say, when he was quite a kid. They were living in Smitsdorp, a little town, important in its way, that lay a few miles north of the Caledon River that marks the boundary between the Cape Colony and the Orange Free State. That is important to remember. His father was prosperous. Wool, I take it. Yes, it must have been wool; for I remember a story that Murray once told me. He was playing alone at the bottom of the garden with a little Kaffir, when one of the house-boys came rushing down upon them, picked them both up – one under each arm – and ran off, shaking the life out of them, to the house. Murray remembered all his sins and thought he was in for a hiding.

But it wasn't that. The house was full of the big, side-whiskered men of that generation, talking seriously together. All were armed, and none took any notice of Charlie.

Then came his mother, scrambling down the bamboo ladder that led to the loft, with a couple of old Dutch elephant guns: brutes that would take a couple of ounces of lead and kick you

into the middle of last week. When she saw him she gave a gasp. 'Thank God!' she said, but she didn't kiss him. She told him to run and fetch a pot of mutton fat, of the kind that they used to boil down from the tails of sheep, to grease the guns with. When he came back she took it from him without a word, and the room was so full that he slipped under the table with a dog called Bles and the little nigger that had been snatched up beside him.

From this refuge he caught stray words of the men's conversation. They were talking about Moshesh – Moshesh and the Basutos. And then the farm-boys came running in with great bales of wool with which they began to pack the windows so that the house grew dark. He was frightened by the dark and the trampling; he hated the greasy smell of wool, and the dust under the table made him sneeze; so he crawled out on to the *stoep* at the back of the house and asked his special friend, a Cape boy named Klaas September, what it was all about. Klaas pointed to the hills, the great lion-coloured foot-hills crouching in front of the Maluti Mountains. 'Kaffirs coming,' he said. 'Moshesh is a great king. They will crack your skull with their kerries like a snail shell, and put a sharp stick into your body. Look, you can see them!'

But all that Charlie saw was a number of black dots scattered over the mountain like sheep, and a few ponies moving along the skyline; and before he knew where he was his mother had found him again and hauled him in and put him to bed in the loft as a punishment for his wickedness and daring. So he poked a hole in the thatch, and saw the men ride out from Smitsdorp. He heard shots fired and saw puffs of smoke on the mountain till he grew bored and went to sleep.

Next day the Basutos had gone, the bales of wool were carried back to the store and the windows washed clear of the grease stains that the bales had made on them.

A long digression – but such digressions were the essence of Murray's stories.

Murray's father, then, was a wool merchant. Wool was his staple business; but in those early days a man of spirit took his turn at many things. He was also a solicitor, practising in the

little Landdrost's Court at Smitsdorp. The Boers were a litigious race, and Murray's father generally had his hands full; for men who had to stand their trial knew that if they had a good case he would fight for them and that the bench respected him. Indeed, the two men with whom he had most to do in Smitsdorp were the magistrate and the governor of the jail.

This last was a deplorable affair; but in that poor country there was no money for a better. It was a great hollow square, like a cattle kraal, with high walls of undressed stone and a *chevaux-de-frise* of broken glass on the top. The back of the building lay up against the side of a hill, so that the innermost cells were walled with red rock through which, in the rainy season, water oozed and dripped. The safest jail in the Free State it was called. Certainly it was the most noisome, and for this reason it was the custom of the judges in Bloemfontein to send the more desperate criminals there to serve their sentences. Most of them were cattle-stealers or horse-thieves; for in both these games the border natives excelled, and the job was sufficiently profitable for a white man to lend them a hand.

And here comes the most remarkable thing of all: that in a Boer country, among a race that has always recognized a colour-bar, black men and white men were imprisoned together. Murray's father had always protested against this; he had even induced the Smitsdorp burghers to petition against it; but the answer was always the same: the finances of the Free State wouldn't allow them to erect separate prisons; when more money came in other arrangements might be made. This troubled old Murray's mind. He knew that the jail was a disgrace to the country. Whenever he went there he came back sickened with its filth and its darkness, full of pity for the chained savages inside. For they wore chains: a heavy ring round the neck, another for each ankle, and between them two lengths of half-inch chain that clanked as they walked. At night they were chained together, four to a cell. For food they had nothing but a small ration of mealie-pap.

The governor of the jail was a dark, violent Dutchman, a survivor of the Great Trek, who felt bitterly towards all living creatures, and respected nobody but Murray. He didn't live at

the jail. He knew better than that. He had his own farm a mile or more away, and rode over in the evening to see the prisoners when his other cattle had been kraaled. For the rest they were left in charge of four natives: a Griqua, named April, and three Zulus, proud of their guns and their uniform, lazy and tyrannous.

Except in winter, when it was swamped, the jail was badly supplied with water, and so it came into old Murray's mind one day that he might do himself and the prisoners a good turn by giving them a chance of a bath in his dam. Rensburg, the governor, wouldn't have understood it as an act of charity, so Murray suggested that the prisoners might do an afternoon's work on his land before they bathed, and Rensburg, who was always ready to help a man who might be of service to him in the future, particularly when he could do so at the public expense, consented. Murray's suggestion filled him with admiration. It was a slim idea to get the work of twenty men for nothing under the guise of charity. Murray knew what he was about!

3

And so Charlie Murray's story begins.

'By that time,' he told us, 'I was a boy of twelve or thirteen. They used to come over every Saturday, and I used to watch them grinding up the hill, twenty poor devils, sweating their souls out! The Zulu guard used to walk behind with a rifle, and April, the Griqua, in front with a pipe in his mouth. When they got to the top they'd halt and stand there panting like blown oxen, waiting to be told the work they had to do. Then they'd drag off with their chains into the fields. I remember how they used to make a rush for the dam – just like cattle – when the work was over, stripping off their coats and splashing the water up over their naked chests and faces. They'd some fine chests on them, too! April usually joined them, while the Zulu sat on the bank smoking, with his rifle across his knees. While they were bathing they became different creatures. You wouldn't believe it. They laughed and splashed one another like a lot of kids playing, and shouted out their Kaffir jokes to the guard on the bank and to me. I used to answer them back in Kaffir, too. It struck me as rather

fine to be making jokes with murderers – particularly as I'd been forbidden to talk to them at all!

'Every Saturday, somehow or other, I managed to get down to the dam, and one day I got a surprise. I saw that one of the prisoners who had stripped along with the others was a white man. Earlier in the day, when they marched up, I hadn't noticed him. After that I couldn't help thinking of it, and when supper came along I couldn't keep it back.

' "This afternoon one of the prisoners was a white man," I said.

' "How do you know that?" asked my father.

' "I saw them bathing," said I.

' "Haven't you been told not to do that?" said my mother.

'But she, too, was interested. "I thought all that was over," she said. "Didn't you speak about it?" She implied that if he *had* spoken about it, it was as good as done. "Yes," said my father, "I did speak about it; but it's no good! They say they have no room anywhere else." "It's a scandal!" said my mother. "Yes, it's a scandal, but we can do nothing."

'No more was said about it, and for some weeks I saw no more of the white prisoner. Then, one afternoon, I came down into the orchard where the convicts were earning their bathe by cultivating in between the trees. I came down there for a special reason: I wanted a nest out of the top of an almond tree. Up I went, thinking myself no end of a climber, showing off a bit, because I knew the poor devils were watching me. Then I missed my balance and came down a darned sight quicker than I'd climbed; and the next thing I knew was sitting up, dazed, with the white prisoner on the ground beside me. "How be 'ee, son?" he said. "A bit shaken up, I reckon. Was it that nest you were after?" I nodded. I didn't quite know where I was, but in another second that chap was shinning up the tree with his irons clanking on either side of him. He went up like a darned monkey. I'd never seen a man climb so quickly. When he came down he had the eggs in his mouth and handed them over to me. "If that's what you wanted," he said, "you've come to the right shop. There's not a tree in the world that I couldn't climb, even with

these things on." I asked him why. "Because I'm a sailor," he said, "and a sailor has to go aloft in a gale of wind that'd blow your guts out." I'd never seen a sailor before, and told him so. "If you don't believe me," he said, "look at this!" And he stripped his arm to the shoulder and showed me the tattooing of a dragon that he'd got done in China with flames coming out of its mouth. And on his chest he'd got a full-rigged ship with all her canvas set. "Not a sheet out of place," he said. And he may have been right. At any rate you could read the ship's name. *Alabama* she was called.

'After that we stayed talking for a bit. I'd never met a man in my life I liked better, and it was a rum experience, anyway, to be yarning with a chap that was doing time. I hoped he was a murderer; but he didn't look like it. I can see him now: a sturdy fellow with a broad chest – it had to be, to hold that ship – and bright brown eyes like a bird's. He had a beard that grew right up to them, brown and curly without a grey hair in it, and a hooked nose peeling with sunburn. The guard was smoking at the other end of the orchard, and so we sat down under the almond tree and he began telling me yarns about places he'd seen all over the world, hunting whales, diving for pearls, doing all the things that boys like to hear about but which had never come my way. In the middle of Africa in those days we didn't run to books, and Crang – that was his name – was as good as a library.

'He'd been everywhere, or said he had, and in any case I believed him. And then suddenly he dropped back into talking about his own home in Devonshire; a place called Ditsam if I remember rightly. My people never talked about England. My father had quarrelled with his parents and never made it up; he wanted to forget about it. But it seemed to me that boys had a much better time there than in the Free State, tickling trout in the streams and bird-nesting in the hedges. I didn't know what a hedge meant. There we sat talking and the time slipped by. And then, all of a sudden, I saw Crang rolled over from behind, and the Zulu guard kicking him as though he'd kill him. The brute had got his boots on too. Poor old Crang got mixed up with his chain and couldn't find his feet. When he did he looked at

me, and if I ever saw murder in a man's eyes I saw it that day. He never said a word. He just marched off to join the others with the Zulu blackguard kicking him behind. If he had showed fight I believe I should have joined in. I cried about it that night, though I didn't dare to tell my father. After seeing Crang's eyes I made sure he was in for murder, and that was a point in his favour.

'So, next week I waited for him – they were still working on the orchard, and we had another talk. By gad! it was like a new world to me. I'd never been farther from home than Bloemfontein. The week after, I pinched some of the tobacco my dad kept for the Kaffirs, and gave it to Crang. It was a treat to see the chap chew! "You've saved my life, son, and that's the truth!" he told me. And it seemed to do him good to get things off his chest, to talk about the sort of life he led in the *tronk*, as the Boers call a jail. That Kaffir was a fair devil. You can understand it. The man was a savage by nature, and no check on him, for Rensburg drew his salary for looking after the jail, and left it at that. If ever a white man suffered hell, poor Crang did. They slept four together, in a hole like a pigsty. Crang lay at the end of the chain, next to a lousy Basuto horse-thief. You don't believe it? But it's true! This actually happened under the Boer Government of the Free State in the 'sixties!

'Well, my heart fairly bled for the poor devil, and when I'd plucked up my last ounce of courage, I managed to ask him what he was in for.

' "Son," he said, "it's manslaughter; but I swear to God I'm as innocent as a lamb!" To tell you the truth, I'd much rather it had been murder, and Crang guilty; but it seemed that he was merely serving a sentence of five years in chains. "Five years," he said, "and only six months gone!" He told me that he'd have committed suicide long ago if he'd had the chance. He would have drowned himself in father's dam. The trouble was that he could swim like a fish, and couldn't sink if he tried. "I'd have done it at night," he said, "but what can you do when you're chained to a dirty Basuto? You couldn't bleed to death without waking him, and I haven't got a knife. Now what would you do, son?"

'I took it very seriously, but I'm hanged if I could tell him. What I wanted to be getting at was the story of his crime, and so I begged him to tell me. "Understand, first of all, that I'm innocent," he said. And I told him I believed him. It was a long yarn. He had deserted his ship at Port Elizabeth, as lots of men did in those early days of the diamonds, and had been tramping to Kimberley. On the way he put up for the night at a Jew store somewhere near Bethulie, and got blind drunk. That same night some Kaffirs broke into the store, killed the Jew, and left Crang asleep. Next day Crang woke to discover the murder. He was still fuddled, but clear enough to make his way to the next farm and report the crime. The farmer was one of the Landdrost's court, and Crang, instead of being thanked, found himself arrested. Everything was against him. The Kaffirs gave evidence. They had heard sounds of a struggle in the night. And here was a desperate character, an Englishman, tramping to the diamond fields with a fair sum of money in his pocket, and he was too drunk to know what he had done. It was lucky that they didn't make it murder. Five years in chains and not a friend in the country! "If it wasn't for the chains," he said, "I could bear it."

'Now if there's one thing that appeals to a boy it's a sense of justice. I believed the chap. He'd cried like a child when he told me, and I cried with him. That night I had it out with my father; told him the whole story as Crang had given it to me. First I got a good hiding for having talked to him; then my father said he'd see about it. And he did. I knew he would, and kept quiet waiting to hear what he'd say. That week I only saw Crang for a second. "I've told my dad about you," I said. "God bless you," says he, "that was the luckiest nest that I ever took."

'Next day my father called me up to him. "Charlie," he said, "I've been looking into the matter of that man Crang. I've had his papers from the court at Bloemfontein, and it's just possible he may have told you the truth." It seems that he went straight up to old Rensburg and put the case to him. Then he got him to ride along with him to the *tronk*. They saw Crang together, heard his story, and talked it over. My father pointed out to Rensburg that Crang was the only white man in the place, and

that it wasn't fair to chain him up to a Kaffir and let him be knocked about by a blackguard. Rensburg saw the force of this, particularly when my father told him that this was the way to make the Kaffirs get above themselves. So they came to an agreement. My father made himself responsible for Crang. Crang swore on his honour that he wouldn't try to escape if he had his chains knocked off and was allowed to sleep in a pigsty of his own. And next time that they came to the dam I saw Crang without his chains.

'He just caught a moment to thank me. "Charlie," he said, "I'll never forget you as long as I live. I tell you, it's heaven!" Well, if the *tronk* at Smitsdorp was heaven, it must have been pretty hellish before.

'And so it went on. Every Saturday we met and had a yarn; sometimes it was just a whisper. By that time I'd decided that I was going to be a sailor myself! Great times we had. . . . Sometimes he'd talk about his life in the *tronk*; sometimes we didn't mention it; but all the time I knew that he was having a pretty rough passage with the guard, who could knock him about even though he wasn't chained. But Crang was a plucky fellow, and never grumbled. He'd had more than one chance of escape, and would have taken it like a bird if he hadn't given his word to my father. He told me so, quite frankly. You couldn't help admiring the chap, and so I used to do everything that I could do for him: slipping a bit of meat off my plate at dinner time, or pinching a few inches of tobacco and an old pipe of my father's. So two years passed. . . .

'Then we had a nasty knock. My father died. You'd never have thought it of a great strong chap like that; but the winters in the Free State are worse than anything you get up here. He got pneumonia, and wouldn't lie in. He had a case on, and his client depended on him. It was the worst thing I remember in my life; but it made a man of me. I was fifteen and the only son. We had only the farm to live by, and I had to take the whole weight of it. You see, I was a big chap for my age. What's more, my father had made good friends, so that if it came to sales some of them would give a lift to my stuffs, or let me in easy if I wanted

to buy. It turned my head a bit, I don't mind telling you; but I worked like a horse for all that. I never saw Crang for weeks on end. I'd no time for listening to stories, and when the Saturday came round that the convicts marched up to bathe as usual I might be twenty miles away.

'One afternoon I came across him in the same old orchard, and the sight of him gave me a shock. The man had fallen away to nothing. His nose was like a bird's beak, and his eyes sunk in his head. "Well, Charlie," he says, "so you've forgotten me." I flushed up properly. I hadn't exactly forgotten him, but I hadn't taken any trouble to see him. He came up closer, and I saw that one eye and all that side of his temple were black with a bruise. "What have you been up to?" I said. "It's that blasted Zulu," says he. "He's got a down on me, and so have all the other niggers in the *tronk*. It's no good; it's one against twenty-three, and your poor dad's dead and gone. I'm worse off now than ever I was."

'Then he came right up to me. "Look here, Charlie," he said, "I gave your dad a promise. I've kept it. That's true, ban't it?" "Certainly you've kept it," I said. "And now he's dead and gone," he went on, "that promise is still there. I don't want to put a slur on his memory. But this I tell you straight. I'm done. I can't go on!" I didn't need telling that, I could see that the chap was done. "It's this way," he said. "I reckon you've come into your father's promise. If you want to bind me to it, I'm bound. But if you release me from it, I'm off. I think I see my way to it."

'I could say nothing. "I'll ask my mother," I said. "Now! for God's sake," says he, "don't go and drag a woman into it! Just tell me this: am I free of my word? Will you give it back to me?" Well, what could I do?

' "Yes," I said, "as far as I'm concerned you're free."

' "Thank God you're a sportsman, Charlie," he said. He gave me a good old handshake. "And now there's one thing more. Will you help me?"

'Well, that was a question I didn't wait to answer. A lad of fifteen does not think much about laws or things of that sort. I said "Yes" at once, and asked him what he wanted me to do.

'Not much," he said. "I want you to give me a rough chart of the country and tell me a place where I can lie quiet for the night. Then I want you to put me up some food and a suit of your dad's clothes. That's all."

'So we had a talk about the lie of the land and the course of the Caledon River. His idea, you see, was to get out of the Free State as quickly as possible, and the river was the boundary between it and the Cape Colony. We decided that he might spend the night in a poplar thicket at the top of our valley, four or five miles above the dam. There used to be a Boer farm there, but they just went north with their wagons, like they do, and left the place to go to waste. Above the dam the hill-side rises pretty steeply – it's almost a cliff – and we settled that next Saturday I should hide the clothes, with a loaf of bread and some biltong, at the top of it. "Leave the rest to me," said Crang, and at this the Zulu blackguard came up and we said no more.

'That next Saturday was the most exciting day of my life up to date. It was a blazing hot morning. I hid the clothes and the food at the top of the cliffs as we'd arranged, and then I waited in the bushes on the other side to see what would happen. The afternoon was a scorcher, too. The convicts came up and did their bit of work. Then the two guards marched them down to the dam. They began to strip for bathing. And I lay there watching Crang. You've got to remember that he was the only man without chains.

'He didn't seem in any hurry to bathe. I saw him at a distance, slinking round the edge of the dam like a dog that's got scent of something, and looking out of the corner of his eye at the Zulu who had the gun. It was the best play that I ever saw! When the other guard saw the prisoners in the water he couldn't resist it. He stripped naked, and went and lay in it, and the Zulu watched him. He was stretched out on the ground with his rifle on a rock a yard or two away. I saw old Crang hovering over that rifle like a hawk; but the Zulu had half an eye on it too, and there was nothing doing. It was a queer thing – you could see that nigger thinking of the cool water as he lay there in the heat. I kept on saying to myself: "Why don't you get in, you swine?"

It almost seemed as if by thinking of it you could make him do it. Know what I mean? Poor old Crang must have been thinking just the same as myself. . . .

'Then suddenly the Zulu got up on his haunches and began to pull at his coat. "It's coming," I thought. "By gad, it's coming!" Crang came a bit nearer, and the guard asked him why he hadn't washed according to orders. Crang slunk off again. I couldn't hear what he said. The Zulu began to rub his naked chest with his nails, like a great monkey scratching. Then he got up, and went to the edge of the water.

'It all came in a second. As soon as his back was turned Crang was on that rifle. The Zulu swung round. "It's murder," I thought, "and if it is, I'm in it. Crang's a white man." But there was no need for that. Crang swung the rifle in the air and brought it down on a rock, splintering the butt to pieces. That was his plan. All that he feared was that rifle. Otherwise he knew they couldn't catch him. He was off like a flash, and the Zulu after him. Up the hill-side, over the rocks – I've never seen a man climb like that in my life, and the Zulu wasn't far behind him. It was a pretty even match, for poor old Crang was weak with want of food. At the top of the *kranz* the Zulu was gaining. Crang stopped and picked up a big rock. He heaved it over his head. "You black swine," he shouted, "if you move another yard I'll dash your dirty brains out!" He could have done it, and the Zulu knew. He stopped, and Crang went on up the mountains like a damn rock-rabbit. And there was I, forgetting that I was supposed not to be there, standing up above the bushes shouting, "Go it – go it!" at the top of my voice!

'I went home that evening more excited than I can tell you. I wanted to take some one into my confidence, but there was nobody but my mother, and I was scared of her. She was too good. Next morning at daybreak I rode up to the place where I'd hidden the clothes. They were gone. "Well, that's over," I thought, "I've finished with Crang for life."

'Of course you know the proper end of this story. Crang ought to have died a millionaire and left me his fortune. Well, he didn't, or you may bet your soul I shouldn't be here this night. For a

year or two I often thought of him; and then he went right out of my mind. A good deal happened in those years.

'We sold the house and farm at Smitsdorp. After my father died there was no point in living so near the town. We moved to a new place sixteen miles away from the dorp. When I was eighteen I fell in love with my first; and that's quite enough to keep a man's mind busy.

'One evening – I can't even tell you the year – I was ploughing. None of your tractors in those days! I'd sent the niggers off to the compound, and went on ploughing myself right up to sunset. I wanted to finish a big patch for the mealies, and as I ploughed I was thinking of Bessie so that I hardly knew what I was doing. I went round and round that field so that by sunset there was only a narrow strip to finish. "Well," I thought, "I may as well get it done while I'm about it." There was a moon, you see. So I gave old Scotland a flick with the whip and told him he'd for to finish it. You could talk to that ox like you'd talk to a dog.

'All through that last half-hour I saw that there was a fellow watching me on the edge of the ploughland. I noticed him specially because you might go for six months without seeing a stranger on our new farm. I wondered what he wanted, though I'd no intention of stopping my work to ask him. When I'd finished I left the plough where it was and started driving the span of oxen home; and then he came to meet me: a little chap, dressed all in black, like a shopkeeper, with a billycock hat on his head and a little black bag in his hand. He came up to me and took off his hat. I guessed he wanted to sell something and was ready to turn him off. "Is this Mr. Charles Murray?" he says. "That's my name," says I. "Well, you've grown away all right!" he said.

'I laughed. "And who might you be?" I asked.

' "Don't you remember me?" says he. "No, I don't," said I. Then he stripped off his coat and rolled up his sleeves, holding out his arm. I thought the chap was mad. "Take a look at this," he said. Then I saw it was tattooed with a great dragon. "By God," says I, "it's Crang!" "Crang it is!" said he. "I thought you'd remember me, son." I took him by the arm. "You'd better

come along to the house and have some supper," said I. "No, son," says he, "I daren't do it. This is the Free State, and there's a warrant still out against me. But I'd like to have a yarn all the same."

'So I left the oxen to graze, and we two sat down on the veld and talked in the moonlight. It was a queer story he told me. After he'd got clear of the guard on that Saturday afternoon he had gone to the poplar grove where we'd settled he should hide. In the middle of the night he'd come back for the food and the suit of clothes. And then he had a stroke of bad luck. I told you that the stuff was hidden at the top of a cliff? Well, in the dark poor old Crang missed his footing, fell twenty feet and smashed his arm. A fine old business for a man as weak as he was! But he stuck to it, and he got his clothes, and the next night he struggled across country somehow or other to the Caledon River. And there he had another bit of bad luck. The river was in flood, and he had to swim it, broken arm and all. He must have been pretty near dead when he reached the other side.

'And here comes the funny part of the business. He had to get his arm mended somehow or other; there was no hospital nearer than Aliwal North; and, if you'll believe it, the only hospital there was the jail! Out of one jail and into another! I tell you we had a good laugh over it. But that jail was a British one, and heaven after Smitsdorp. They looked after him finely for a couple of months and turned him out cured.

'Then he went down to Port Elizabeth and got work of some sort. He saved a bit of money – Smitsdorp had cured him of the drink for life – and set up in a coal and wood business on his own. He must have made a pretty good thing of it; money was easier to make in those days; but the man could never get the diamond fields out of his mind. So just before I saw him he'd sold up his business and trekked off again, going this time by the coach that used to run from Port Elizabeth to Kimberley. That coach passed through Smitsdorp; and when he saw the old *tronk* on the side of the hill, he had remembered me and felt it his duty to let me know he was alive, and to thank me. That shows you he was a good sort; for, as he said, the warrant was still

out against him. He went to the hotel in Smitsdorp, and there found out that we'd left the place. But that didn't stop him. He walked a good sixteen miles over the veld to find me, and did it, as I've told you.

'I asked him if I could help him with money; but he opened his black bag and showed me that it was crammed with bank-notes and gold. "I'm a rich man," he said, "and in Kimberley I shall double it." I shook my head, but there was no stopping him. "It's a fine moonlight night," he said, "and I'd better be getting on my way."

'So he shook hands. "You'll see me again, son, never fear," he said. "I'll write to you from Kimberley." It was a funny thing to see that little chap, with his black bag, moving off into the dusk. When I was just losing sight of him he turned and waved to me. I've never liked any man better in my life.

'That was the last of him, and the last I heard. He never wrote to me from Kimberley. Perhaps he lost all his money and was ashamed. Perhaps – I don't know – at that time the Kimberley diggings were about the most unhealthy place on earth. They used to get a kind of malaria or typhus – they called it "Diggings Fever" – and men died there like flies. I expect that was what happened to poor old Crang. Well, he'd had a good run for his money, he'd thanked me for the little help I gave him; and he'd got to Kimberley. He'd always told me that his chief ambition was to find a rough diamond, and that's just about the best name you could give him. I reckon we'll have another pipe and turn in. . . .'